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The drama of Ahmed Yerima : studies in Nigerian theatre

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Chapter four

Socio-political realist plays:

The Lottery Ticket, Kaffir's Last Game, The Sisters, Mojaqbe, and Little Drops

The relationship between drama and socio-political engagement is at stake in Nigerian literary criticism at least since the first playwrights began to publish in European languages.⁴⁵⁸ This chapter will investigate this relationship in the specific case of Ahmed Yerima's drama. It will also raise the question if the playwright's artistic expression can be independent or not. According to Femi Osofisan:

Literature can entertain, in fact must entertain, but it is only the dim or brainwashed artist who is content merely to entertain, to play the clown. The primary value of literature seems to me to lie in its subversive potential, that explosive charge which lies hidden behind the facade of entertainment and which must be controlled and made to [explode] for the use of our people, of mankind . . . Literature must be used to play its role in the advancement of our society, in the urgent struggle against neocolonialism and the insidious spread of fascism.⁴⁵⁹

This statement by Femi Osofisan captures, to a large extent, the thematic preoccupation of the majority of Nigerian literary drama. Nigerian literary dramatists often rely on what Osofisan refers to as the "subversive potential, that explosive charge which lies hidden behind the facade of entertainment."⁴⁶⁰ This potential serves to remind the people of the wrong-doing of governments and other social institutions. While it was a little difficult to stage political assertive plays under the military government of the 1990s, there was no censorship of published texts. Playwrights in Nigeria usually publish their own texts by giving them to desired press. Nigeria government has not clamped down on publishing companies who publish material without first submitting it to the necessary government agency. This means that a playwright will have his work published as long as he can afford the cost of publication. The publishing

⁴⁵⁸ See James E. Henshaw, *This is Our Chance: Plays from West Africa* (London: ULP, 1956)

⁴⁵⁹ Awodiya, Muyiwa, (ed.), *Excursions in Drama and Literature: Interview with Femi Osofisan* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 1993), 9

⁴⁶⁰ Awodiya, Muyiwa, (ed.), *Excursions in Drama and Literature: Interview with Femi Osofisan* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 1993), 10

companies are privately owned; to remain in operation, they will publish any material given to them. Based on the almost lacking of censorship of published drama in Nigeria, playwrights seize the opportunity to discuss political and social issues as the issues affect them. However, at what point did socio-realist issues become fulcrum for dramatic creation in Nigeria? According to Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi:

Nigeria, Athena-like, popped out of Lord Lugard's head without the would-be Nigerians participating in the birthing process. In the absence of the patriarch, the result has been a monstrous polygynous household, incapacitated with petty rivalries, perpetually at war with itself. ...⁴⁶¹

What Ogunyemi Chikwenye called “monstrous polygynous household” (a coalescence of different ethnic nationalities) coupled with an unstable political system, electoral fraud and corruption brought about the first military coup in Nigeria on January 15, 1966, six years after its independence. Shortly after, the nation was plunged into an orgy of killing in a three-year civil war that began in 1967 and ended in 1970. Since its independence in 1960, political changes in Nigeria through elections have been fraught with manipulation, hence, the military is always waiting in a corner to seize power when the people complain. Past military leaders in Nigeria were no different than politicians because they were not particularly interested in conducting a credible election. For example, until Gen. Sani Abacha, the military head of state at the time died suddenly in office in 1997, he organized a symbolic election in order to remain in office whereby no significant change of any sort was going to transpire. The symbolic election is a system, which does not constitute a means of altering the top leadership, the administration, or the regime. This process of forced political transition in the form of military coup d'état has been the most prevalent way of inducing change against the will of those in office⁴⁶² in the majority of African countries. The outcome of these symbolic elections have been political instability and civilian insurrection, which are now of rapid frequency in Nigeria. In his reconstruction of the Nigerian civil war barbarity, Soyinka wrote *Madmen and Specialist* (1971), as a tragic satire of humankind immersed in war. As indicated in the introduction, Femi Osofisan and Kole Omotosho are basically concerned with the neo-colonial state of the Nigerian nation with all

⁴⁶¹ Ogunyemi, Chikwenye O., *Africa Wo/man Palava: The Nigerian Novel by Women* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 332

⁴⁶² Chazan, N., Mortimer, R., Ravenhill, J., Rothchild, D., *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1992), 215

its attendant problems. In the 1990s, attention of the various dramatists shifted from creating a collective or community heroic figure to creating survivalists; how an individual survived the strangulating neo-colonial social, political, and economic realities within the society.

The new plays are focused on individual survival strategies rather than an elusive utopian society as the one that is presented in the plays of the radical dramatists. The survivalist dramatists present characters that strive to emerge from the strangulating laws and treatments given by the government and society at large. To these characters, attention is not focused on fighting for the freedom of the group by rousing collective heroes, but finding an opportunity for individual survival with or without external support.

The Lottery Ticket, *Kaffir's Last Game*, *The Sisters*, *Mojagbe*, and *Little Drops*, are socio-political realist plays because they represent the reality of the country where they emerged in the same manner as the previous plays. I have grouped these plays under realism based on their thematic preoccupations and writing style of the playwright. Some of these works also deal with the impermanence of human existence. Contrary to the religious realist plays discussed in chapter three of this thesis, all the plays discussed in this chapter are human-centred. They emphasize "people's rational understanding, agency, and progressive capacities."⁴⁶³ These plays are inspired by on the social, political and economic reality of the Nigerian state. They discuss the decadence that permeates the nation's social and political space over the past two decades (1990-2010). This is a period when greed, corruption, unemployment, poverty, political and sectarian violence were at their highest. This is also the period when government marginalization of the working class is a determinant for the mass exodus to the land where the grass seems greener (Europe and United States).

In Nigeria, coup d'état, sit-tight governance, and violence were the alternative to good government. Between 1990 and 1999, Nigeria had five different governments, three of which were military. In the following decade, there were two transitional governments as a result of the return to democratic governance. In some of the works studied, especially in *Little Drops*, the issue of women suffering at the hands of weapons-wielding violent militants who call themselves freedom fighters and government's forces is discussed. These militants' violence, as well as the recent destructions being perpetuated by the

⁴⁶³ Morris, Pam, *Realism* (London/New York: Routledge, 2003), 166

Islamic Fundamentalist Boko Haram⁴⁶⁴, have put Nigeria in the global map of modern domestic terrorism. The military activities treated in *The Mirror Cracks*, which I have already discussed in chapter three, would have found a space here, but it is not a central issue in the drama. Supo's military violence is used in the play to explain the hypocritical attitude of religious organized institutions. Another topic related to political violence is to be seen in *Kaffir's Last Game*⁴⁶⁵: The play discusses the current diplomatic relations between South Africa and Nigeria by x-raying the socio-political entanglement in and between the two nations. The play also highlights that the violence the Nigerian military government of General Sanni Abacha visited on opposition groups. In order to escape assassination, many political activists and academics fled the country; those who were not lucky enough to escape were put in jail or murdered. Yerima uses Professor Omobusola in *Kaffir's Last Game* to represent the voice of freedom fighters that were put in jail by the government.

In the author's note to *Kaffir's Last Game*, Yerima writes that the play is his "reaction to the relationship between two great countries, South Africa and Nigeria...The essence... is the love-hate relationship between both countries."⁴⁶⁶ His motivation for this play, some few years after South Africa emerged from a strangulating apartheid regime, is worthy of study. To help South Africans out of the evil of apartheid, Nigeria played a pivotal role by expending both human and financial resources. Nigeria also provided a ready home for the oppressed black population of South Africa. However, true to Yerima's prognosis, "the love-hate relationship between both countries" came to a head in 2008. In a series of xenophobic attacks, many South Africans began to dispossess of properties and, in some cases outrightly to kill non-nationals in South Africa, including Nigerians residing or travelling through the country.⁴⁶⁷

In *The Sisters*, there is the unraveling of the vanity and deceit that characterize the lives of the high and mighty in the Nigerian society. The play

⁴⁶⁴ None of the plays studied discuss the issue of Islamic Fundamentalist group known as Boko Haram. This is because the group only became known in 2010 when President Goodluck Jonathan assumes office as the President of Nigeria at the sudden death of President Umar Musa Yar'dua in March 5, 2010. The Boko Haram (No to any form of Western education) group, whose mission is to enthrone Sharia in Nigeria, plans to overthrow the government of Jonathan whom they consider an infidel as he is a non-Muslim. They have succeeded in destabilizing government in some states in Northern Nigeria by detonating bombs in many public buildings including Christian Churches and killing innocent worshippers.

⁴⁶⁵ *Kaffir's Last Game* was written in 1997, and had its premiered performance in February, 1998

⁴⁶⁶ Yerima, Ahmed, *Kaffir's Last Game* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 1998), 6

⁴⁶⁷ See BBC mobile, "SA Leader Orders Army to Deploy", 16:17 GMT, Wednesday, 21 May 2008 17:17 UK. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7412128.stm>

stresses the impermanency of life, political power and social status. The play, along with *Mojagbe*, makes a truism of the Nigerian maxim “No condition is permanent.” In *Little Drops*, through the overt deployment of socio-political realism, the playwright makes the lines between illusion and reality almost non-existent. In both *The Sisters* and *Little Drops*, there is the exposition of the facts that in most male dominated or phallogentric societies, women remain subservient and are often reduced to commodities.

Structure

All the plays studied are one-act plays that follow a linear progression. Apart from *Kaffir's Last Game*, the rest of the plays have a “moving” plotline-a situation where there is a constant entry and exit of characters. All the plays have more than a single subplot; nevertheless, one issue leads to another in quick succession without abandoning the main plot. The storylines are simple enough for ease of understanding without major complications. Apart from *Mojagbe*, whose action takes place over many days and which also has a change of scene from Mojagbe's palace to the masquerade grove, the rest of the plays take place in one day and in one location. With these plays, Yerima seems to be making a call to the reader-audience to re-examine government attitude toward civilian lives and national values and to resist the onslaught on integrity of human lives that is fast eroding the moral lives of society.

As the plays progress, Yerima, at intervals, brings the reader-audience back to the seriousness and the setting of the plays with much paraphernalia. For example, *Mojagbe*⁴⁶⁸, the only one among the plays under discourse with a pre-colonial setting, is crafted within the traditional African performance mode with music, dance, chants and songs as embellishment and propelling tools. In *Kaffir's Last Game* there is an occasional announcement from the airport public address system informing passengers of the arrival of a new flight, delay, departure and cancellation of others. In *The Lottery Ticket* and *Mojagbe*, there is the use of radio jingles, songs, incantations, poetry, backchannel communication like “yes, oh yes, uh, yeee, hum, yeah, ha ha, oh, taitai, mama”, and so on, which are also frequent in *The Sisters* and *Little Drops* as vehicle for effective communication. There is a continuous sound of guns, and explosive devices and war music in *Little Drops* to constantly remind the

⁴⁶⁸ I have not included *Mojagbe* under historical realist plays because it is not a play constructed based on any historical occurrence. The protagonist and other characters of the play were imagined. *Mojagbe* is a fictionalized play that Yerima uses to comment on the contemporary leadership situation in Nigeria. Although, the names of some villages and towns used in the play exist in Nigeria.

characters and the reader-audience where the play is set. All of this paraphernalia, apart from reinforcing the settings of the plays to the reader-audience, also indicate changes in mood and tempo of the plays. They serve as evidence of attention, interest and understanding on the reader-audience's part, and they clearly keep conversations flowing smoothly between the characters of the play.

In *Mojagbe* and *Little Drops*, there is the continuation of the technique of bridging the gap between the worlds of the dead and the living which he had already developed in *The Angel*. This technique allows for the recently dead to appear on stage to reveal a hidden aspect of the play to the protagonist in order to effectively resolve the plays' conflicts. At times this technique creates its own challenges; for example one may ask, "what is the need for breaking the wall of reality with the introduction of the ghost into a possible situation?" and "why does Yerima use the ghost to resolve conflicts?" However, as indicated in the previous chapter, the religious background from which the play emerges recognizes the collapse of the physical and the spiritual world. The traditional Nigerian society believes that some people within the physical world can visit the spiritual world and, in the same manner that some spiritual beings visit the physical world.

The Sisters opens with Nana who comes on stage to switch on the light to reveal a grand room. This is a significant action to the understanding of the play itself since the play is about death; light in this context symbolizes life, while darkness symbolizes death. Within this short interval, there is a transition from death to life (from a world where everything seems to be still to the world where everything moves), from the gloom that the president's death presented to the vivacity that the reunion of the ambassador's children signify. The room, which serves as the setting of the play, is a presidential palace, and the president had just died suddenly in his office, therefore, the nation is in a state of mourning. Like in *The Mirror Cracks* and *The Twist*, death becomes the springboard that propels the movement of *The Sisters* as the play takes place a day before the burial of the late president. According to Yerima, "The president's death provides an occasion for the sisters to come to grips with... realities and to re-examine their lives after all the disappointments and misfortunes they have been through."⁴⁶⁹ I think that what Yerima is saying is that the fear of death and void provide an occasion for self re-assessment by the living.

⁴⁶⁹ Yerima, *The Sisters*, 2001. See the back page.

Like *The Lottery Ticket*, *Kaffir's Last Game* and *Little Drops*, *The Sisters* is a one-act play with non-stop action from the opening to the end. The play is structured around four sisters who are the children of a late ambassador. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, Yerima is class conscious in his plays. Funmi, the supposed eldest of the sisters, is the First Lady of the country (Nigeria). She is powerful and influential. In order to demonstrate her power, she employs state resources to summon her sisters. It is to be noted that her sisters were not part of her life when the president was alive, at least not Taiwo and Toun. This time she wants her sisters by her side in the moment of her grief. This unfortunate meeting and the manner through which they come together allows for the sisters to bare their souls without any restriction. It also allows for the revelation of the atrocities committed by the men in their lives.

Mojagbe, set in a fictitious Yoruba town,⁴⁷⁰ is a play crafted within the traditional African society. It has power and leadership as its thrust and especially how it is easy for the two to be wrongly applied. At the opening of the play, four women in ritual clothing appear on stage with oil lamps bearing staffs with bells, and they move to the rhythm of a ritual music. According to the play, these four women possess the power of witchcraft.

The supernatural power associated with witchcraft among Africans is a malevolent spirit often used to perpetuate wickedness. The people who consult witches and wizards exert esoteric knowledge to achieve negative deeds over their victims. These women are regarded as the owners of the night and darkness, even of the material world. This does not mean that there are no male witches. In many Yoruba communities, there are representations of two types of witchcraft in the society. The witches who often perpetuate wickedness are *Aje Dudu*, while those who work for the good of the society are called *Aje Funfun*.⁴⁷¹ The attributes of African witchcraft share semblance with medieval and later Renaissance Europe, especially as contained in Reginald Scot's *The Discoveries of Witchcraft*.⁴⁷² I doubt if there is much difference with witches represented in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and in the works of many Elizabethan writers either. Raymond Prince argues that among the Yorubas, witchcraft is regarded as feminine art:

⁴⁷⁰ The playwright did not give the name of the town in the play rather he refers to it as a tributary state of Oyo kingdom.

⁴⁷¹ Personal interview with Dr. Gabriel Adekola Oyewo, the Balogun of Oba Community, Osun State, Nigeria on March 15, 2012

⁴⁷² Regina Scot, *The Discoveries of Witchcraft* (Kent: R.C., 1584)

...witchcraft is a feminine art and has its power from Eshu, the trickster god, and was sanctioned, if somewhat reluctantly, by Orunmila (Ifa) the god of Fate, and by Olorun, the Lord of all. This power is generally attributed to older women, but young women or even girls can sometimes be involved. [...] A witch's malignancy may be turned upon a man for almost any reason-for some slight impoliteness, or because he accuses her of being a witch, or because he is getting too high in the world or often for no reason "just because they are evil women".⁴⁷³

Esu, the trickster and messenger god, has been previously discussed in chapter three of this work. Therefore, I will not discuss it again here. It must be noted that the belief in the existence of the witches among the Yorubas, and indeed Africans, is powerful: it is part of everyday reality even among the educated elites and Christians who are always seeking protection from God against their perceived evil machinations. However, it must be noted that the Nigerian traditional society is very well biased towards the emancipation of women from traditional authorities that are often put in place by men. Women who are powerful enough to challenge the male organized traditional institutions are often regarded as witches. For example, Mrs Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti⁴⁷⁴, who organized a women's rebellion against the traditional ruler of Ake, Abeokuta and the colonial imposition of female tax in the 1950s was labelled a witch for her actions.

Wole Soyinka acknowledges the power of the telluric women in his *Madmen and Specialist*, where he refers to them as "Earth Mothers." The Yorubas call the telluric women "Awon Iya Aye" (The Mother of the Earth).

In *Mojagbe*, the telluric women are imbued with positive characteristics as they invoke the spirit of Layewu (ancestral Masquerade of Death) to consume King Mojagbe: the oppressor of the masses. This is often the case when there is fallout between them and someone who had earlier consulted with them for power. Mojagbe was formally under their protection but later falls out of favour with them. According to the leader of the women, the death of the king will "give our people the respite that they need."⁴⁷⁵ The

⁴⁷³ Raymond Prince, "The Yoruba Image of the Witch" in *The Journal of Mental Science* 107, 1961, 795-805

⁴⁷⁴ Mrs Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti was an educated political figure in colonial Nigeria. She organized the women who sent the paramount ruler of Ake kingdom, Abeokuta on an exile in 1950s. She was the first Nigerian woman to drive a car and was also a part of Nigerian delegate to London to demand for the country's independence in the late 1950s. She is the mother of the Nigerian famous Afrobeat musician Fela Anikulapo-Kuti.

⁴⁷⁵ Yerima, Ahmed, *Mojagbe*, 9

people united together and, by aligning their voices with the king-makers, place a white calabash on the throne. The significance of the calabash presentation is synonymous with the Oyo Mesi (king makers of Oyo kingdom) who demands that a failed king commits suicide in order to bring peace to the kingdom. This is where the idea of calabash placement on the throne is borrowed from. Mojabge, recognizing the demands of his people, refuses to act accordingly. Instead, he (Mojagbe) reprimands the Chiefs and pronounces: “and here you all are, the only ones who could have sent such messages of death to the king, my once trusted friends, handpicked by me.”⁴⁷⁶ In order to unseat King Mojabge, the people embark on protests and demonstrations against his various inhuman actions and kingship. Abese reports to the king thus:

Kabiyesi ...it is the women. They have all come from the market led by Iyaloja and the elders of the conclave. They refuse Prince Esan to be beheaded at the market square. Half of them are naked.⁴⁷⁷

King Mojabge responds with anger and irrationally summons his war generals to kill the protesters:

...Insolence! Insubordination! Balogun, take a few palace soldiers and cut them all down.⁴⁷⁸

As *Mojagbe* is a social commentary on the Nigerian political situation, *Kaffir's Last Game* discusses the festering socio-political situation in Nigeria under the tyrannical government of General Sanni Abacha. It also reveals South Africa's problems of youth restiveness and incessant crimes which are often blamed on long years of the apartheid regime. *Kaffir's Last Game* is a two character play; its action is based on the unexpected meeting of a Nigerian Professor of Political Science, Benjamin Omodele Omobusola, and his former student Mbulelo Kwandebile Makwetu from South Africa. Mbulelo Kwandebile Makwetu studied Political Science in Nigeria under Professor Omobusola during the apartheid period in South Africa after which he became a member of the Youth Wing of African National Congress (ANC). At the time, ANC was the leading opposition to the apartheid regime in South Africa. In order to avoid arrest, many of the members' carried-out covert operations from outside the

⁴⁷⁶ Yerima, Ahmed, *Mojagbe*, 26

⁴⁷⁷ Yerima, Ahmed, *Mojagbe*, 30-31

⁴⁷⁸ Yerima, Ahmed, *Mojagbe*, 31

border of the country. Professor Benjamin Omodele Omobusola secures an eighty thousand dollar per year lecturing appointment with a University in Cape Town, and Mbulelo Kwandebile Makwetu asks him to not take the position in South Africa. He wants the professor to continue to fight from within because his departure will deplete the ranks of Nigerian activists who are challenging the military government. It might also be that Mbulelo, who considers the professor as a guru of political science, nurses the ambition of having him write new books on the Nigerian experience from within rather than as an external observer. Professor Omobusola sees his new appointment as manna from heaven after thirty-five years of teaching. He is going to earn in one year in South Africa more than all he earned in total as a professor teaching in Nigeria. Infact, his salary until retirement in Nigeria was ten thousand naira per month. Mbulelo does not share the optimism of the professor; rather he sees departing Nigeria as a bad omen for the nation he is fleeing from. Mbulelo prevails on the professor to not view the appointment as an opportunity of striking a supposed goldmine in a foreign nation.

While Professor Omobusola is a retired university don back in Nigeria, Mbulelo on the other hand is an important political figure in the South African government having risen from the Youth Wing of ANC to the main political party as a freedom fighter. This unexpected encounter of the two political scientists at the Johannesburg Airport reveals many political issues in both countries (Nigeria and South Africa). *Kaffir's Last Game* employs political satire in shedding light on socio-political menace (brain drain, unfavourable political climate, youth restiveness, and dictatorial governance) that are confronting both Nigeria and South Africa. As in *Kaffir's Last Game*, also in *The Lottery Ticket*, Yerima discuss the socio-reality of both the Nigerian society and South Africa. *The Lottery Ticket* is based on the prevalent greed and corruption which pervade every strata of the Nigerian society. Violence and religious chalatanism characterize the lives of many of the play's characters. *Little Drops*, on the other hand, is a tragedy and a realist play set in the swamp or 'battle field' of the Nigeria Niger Delta. The play talks about the pugnacious militant activities in the oil region. Since the militancy activities in the Niger Delta, government revenue from crude oil exploration has dwindled. The government establishment of Joint Military Taskforce (JTF) to combat the militants turns the Niger Delta's creek into a theatre of war. The residents of the region live in fear constantly. For this, in *Little Drops*, the approach of the intruder only means the arrival of danger to Memekize, the hero of the plays, and on whose side of the creek the whole action takes place.

Characters

The characters in the plays studied are realistic. As said earlier in page 3, realism is a discursive strategy that constructs the “impression” of realistic description for a large array of motivations. The plays here are one-act plays, of which their language and characteristics are typical of the role they represent. For example, it is typical in Nigeria to address individuals according to their professions or titles. Their names are means of characterization as in some of the plays of Femi Osofisan. In the plays of Osofisan, it is common to have the characters named after their occupation or social position. Often personalities like clergymen wear their robe or cassock in public to depict their positions. In *The Bishop*, *The Twists* and *The Mirror Cracks*, all the clergymen characters have the prefix reverend or bishop before their names. They are also imbue with mannerisms like calling God at intervals, blessing the characters with them and so on. In *The Sisters* and *The Wives*, the characters wear black clothes to signify mourning. Professor in *Kaffir’s Last Game* is an example of how Yerima use name and description to enhance characterization and make his characters a representation of their class in society. Apart from the military officers in *The Mirror Cracks*, the other characters wear black clothes. The characters in *The Lottery Ticket* use speech as appropriate with their class. Their clothes as described in the play and language are appropriate with their characters.

Yerima often draws his characters from the same social class. It is common to see politicians, diplomats, lawyers, reverend gentleman or bishops as characters in the same play than having them play with people of social status far below their standing in society, except for an occasional inclusion of domestic staff. Since all the plays under discourse are one-act, attention is placed on the characters for the duration captured and not on the physical appearances or their states of mind before the opening of the play.

In *Kaffir’s Last Game*, a two character play, there is the technique of playing multiple roles. Both the sixty-five-year-old Professor Omobusola and the forty-year-old Mbulelo constantly swap roles. They also play different characters in order to achieve the effective satirical exposé of some of the situations being discussed in the play. On one occasion both become singers with Mbulelo leading and at the same time singing the chorus with the professor. The song is to deride the anti-people policies and sit-tight syndrome of African political leaders.⁴⁷⁹

⁴⁷⁹ Yerima, *Kaffir’s Last Game*, 21

Little Drops has six characters who are victims of the militant confrontational activities and government repression tactics in the oil rich Niger Delta region. The play *Little Drops* opens with Memekize, the old woman of about seventy-five years who lives in the swamp by the creek. She is roasting yam and at the same time bemoaning her fate under the barrage of gun fire, when suddenly she hears the approach of an intruder. Almost all six characters in *Little Drops* are women except for Ovievie's ghost and Kuru, a wounded militant leader. Kuru, who is in his early thirties, is seeking an escape route out of the creek as he has lost his colleagues to the superior fire-power of the government JTF forces. The others include Mukume, a woman in her early twenties who was raped by three militant members on her wedding night; Azue, she is in her early twenties, young wife of the murdered King. At the time she appears on stage she has her dead son strapped to her back; and Bonuwo, a school teacher in her mid-forties whose forty-one students were bombed by the JTF's explosives.

The playwright's choice to make a play that has predominantly female characters is intentional. This is an attempt to give voice to females to talk directly to a society that fails to address the plight of women even when it realizes the loss of women yet still requires them to be docile and accept their losses quietly. Women live in fear constantly, losing their husbands, children and daily lives. Even in the midst of the clashes between the militants and the government forces, the women are poised to defend their territories:

She is frightened but tries to remain calm as she continues to watch out for any danger. Then she hears the sound of someone breathing and running. She wears a hood and a big leather jacket. She looks like a tough militant in the dim lights on the stage. She runs to carry what looks like a wrapped gun with a wrapper. She covers the roasting water yam, and hides by the bush.⁴⁸⁰

In the few lines above, Yerima gives a vivid portrayal of life in a war-like situation where the strong-willed prepares to kill or be killed. Memekize, an old woman who has seen both the good and the bad periods of life, becomes the strength and the resilient spirit of the rest of the women and even of Kuru, the defeated militant leader. She symbolizes the resilient spirit of the creek dwellers. To most of the inhabitants of the creeks and the adjoining villages, she is assumed to be a mythical figure. In reverence of her assumed

⁴⁸⁰ Yerima, *Little Drops*, 9

superhuman nature, songs are composed in her name, and she is referred to as the legendary old woman by the river bank. Memekize's dwelling is like a shrine, as it becomes the nourishing point for the deprived and those escaping from the degradation of life. As a realistic character like the others in the play she has suffered losses and shows fear at the approach of danger.

Psychologically, Memekize, who has become unbalanced by the loss of her husband and children in a single day, prefers a melancholic life by staying close to their graves, which she personally dug. For forty years, life stood still for her, and she closed herself to the changes going on in the world around her by staying at the same spot. She survived only on what she could get from the river and swampy forest where she lives.

The beautiful thing about the character of Memekize is that it is not static and not given to a singular interpretation. Her character shifts between realism and symbolism. She symbolizes healing, strength, courage and also a kind of god all the women could worship. She is like the four telluric women in *Mojagbe*, imbued with longevity, power of discernment and manipulation as she easily disarms everyone that comes her way. Azue, Bonuwo, and Mukume unlike Memekize are more realistic in presentation.

In all of the characters, there is evidence of torture, agony and deprivation in time of war. The characters are used as a moral agent to remind humanity of the meaninglessness of war in any guise. From a realist point of view, Mukume is in her early twenties, beautiful, lively and ready to bloom. The symbolic Mukume can be interpreted as the Niger Delta land, defiled and destroyed by different multinational oil companies exploiting for crude oil and running their pipes through the many villages in the creek. The teacher Bonuwo, who had taught some of the militant youths, including Ovievie at the village school, is in her middle-age, while Azue, the young and beautiful widowed queen, is around the same age as Mukume. Azue not only loses her husband (the king) to the militants, she also loses her only child to a stray bullet which could have been fired by either the JTF or the militants. The death of Azue's son signifies the end of a generation. While the old generation represented by the King is murdered in cold blood by those he was representing, with the death of the child the play seems to be telling the Niger Delta militants that if the insurgency is continued, very soon there will be no generation to take over the land they are warring over. The play, to an extent, vindicates the government forces rather than condemning the repressive action taken by it. The massacre of the innocent children by the government explosion

may be interpreted as an attempt to further bring to an end the future generation of the Niger Delta.

Ovievie, as a minor character in the play was killed by his own camp of militants whom he defrauded before running ahead to get married to Mukume. The character of Ovievie seems not necessary in the play, however, as he appeared to explain to Mumuke why he was murdered and to invite her to join him in the land of the dead. Mukume and Bonuwo may be looked upon as not being in the fullness of their senses due to these recent experiences. Their seeing and speaking with Ovievie's ghost may only be a figment of their imaginations as he was taken away and killed by the militants on the night of his marriage to Mukume.

Like in *The Angel* where the murdered Chief appeared to Otunba in his living-room, Ovievie appeared to Mukume, who was not aware that he was part of any militant group, to apologize and abeg for forgiveness. However, at the end of both encounters, we are still at a loss as to whether the two dead people really appeared or if it was only the imagination of those they appeared to. Nevertheless, the reader-audience accepts it as it is part of the social reality of the society of the play. In both plays, at the departure of the ghost characters, both Otunba and Mukume looked as if they have suddenly come out of a trance; they are not sure if the meeting was real or imagined. Since other characters are not aware of their (Otunba and Mukume) experiences, it can be justifiably argued that it is not a real encounter but a ploy to achieve a sense of purgation for these characters.

In the *The Sisters*, Toun is the second of Ambassador's children from his legal wife and is in her mid-fifties. She is a school administrator and a divorcee. She is pretentious and constantly professes her dependence on the Christian faith but relies more on her elder sister Funmi—a superficial character—for support, always ready to agree with her on issues because she lacks the capacity for independent reasoning. Taiwo is quick to reprimand her for always agreeing with Funmi on every matter, even when the latter is wrong:

Taiwo: Please for once Toun agree with yourself. Be your own person, and speak up. Say what you feel.⁴⁸¹

Taiwo, who is fifty-three years old, is the last child of the ambassador. She is a lawyer, novelist, poet, and fearless character. She represents the intellectual minds and conscience of the oppressed people in the Nigerian society. Her

⁴⁸¹ Yerima, Ahmed, *The Sisters*, 33

husband, Joe, had been implicated in a coup against the president ten years earlier and was subsequently executed with the rest of those involved in the coup. According to her, her husband was captured in the night by the government forces at their residence. She was shot at in the melee of the arrest, lost her pregnancy in the process and, subsequently, the use of her legs as a result of a broken pelvis which later confined her to the wheelchair. Throughout the play, Taiwo allows herself the liberty of pointing to the reader-audience the various short-comings of each of the sisters and the men in their lives.

Nana is the illegitimate daughter of Ambassador. At age sixty-two, she is the eldest of four sisters, however, her identity as a blood member of the ambassador's family is unknown by the other sisters who believe her to be a maid until the end of the play. She is docile and dedicates forty-three years of her life to the service of her other sisters without complaints, having promised Ambassadors wife shortly before her death that she would take care of them. Nana is the symbol of uprightness and the strength of her sisters:

Nana: It is funny how we pick all this sadness,

Taiwo: How profound. Nana, how long have you been with us? You always said and done the right things. Always.

Funmi: She has been my rock.⁴⁸²

To all of the sisters, Nana is their source of defence. Funmi says, "She has been my rock" because Nana becomes her strength, help and comfort in time of distress. By referring to Nana as "rock", Funmi invariably equates her with God in her life. A quick look at the Christian Bible reveals at least four instances in the Book of Psalms where we can find references to God as "My rock."⁴⁸³ Yerima's concern in most of his plays seems to be the socio-political effect the message embedded in them will have on the consciousness of the reader-audience and not on the development of a single character. This may have been the reasoning behind individual characters; characters whose actions and speeches can directly affect the reader-audience.

The characters of *The Sisters* and *The Lottery Ticket* are used to satirize the hypocritical nature of human being no matter his status in society. It is possible that many on the lower rung of society are more fraudulent, greedier

⁴⁸² Yerima, *The Sisters*, 26-27

⁴⁸³ See The Book of Psalms 18 verse 2 and 46; Psalms 28 verse 1; 31 verse 3; 42 verse 9; 62 verse 2 and 6; 71 verse 3; and 92 verse 15. In *The Holy Bible*

than the political elite whom they blame for their present status. As situations in *The Lottery Ticket* reveal, many of them lack human compassion. *The Lottery Ticket* has seven characters that ably represent the lower class of the Nigerian society: Mama Lizi, an illiterate operator of a shanty-eating parlour is a fifty-year-old woman. She is strong, zealous in her business, and interested in any venture that will give her more money. Lizi, the daughter, is eighteen years old and helps her mother at her food vending business. She is a self-professed Christian, yet she befriends Danger, a notorious criminal. She is a trained tailor and more intelligent than her mother. Landlord is a sixty-year-old retired civil servant and the owner of the house where Mama Lizi and her daughter reside. He also operates their shanty-restaurant. He is greedy, corrupt and lacks human compassion. To Landlord, money is more important than human life. Yellow Fever, a traffic officer, and Sagent, a police personnel, are two law enforcement officers.

The characters of Yellow Fever and Sagent are a true reflection of the negative aspect of Nigerian security force. The two of them are corrupt officers who prefer to be paid by criminals rather than arresting them. Instead of Yellow Fever telling the circumstances that leads to Danger's death, he collaborates with Mama Lizi to give a false account of the event. Sagent demands that if he is paid, he will not report Danger's death as murder. This means that the murder suspects will not be arrested because he (Sagent) will provide them the needed alibi:

Sagent: Now, now. I want una to know say I be gazetted Police Sagent. If not to say book don spoil we country, I for don be ASP or even DSP, but na as God want am so. Dis case simple, but e fit hard. All dey for una hand. If una see me well, na as una talk and wan do am, na so gofment go take hear am. (SE⁴⁸⁴: *Right now. I will like you to know that I am a confirmed Police Sergeant. I would have been made an Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) or Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), except that everything goes to those who are well educated in this country, however, this is the way God as planned it. The issue here is simple, but it can be made serious. It all depends on you. If you pay well, things will be the way you said it is, I will report it to the government like that.*)

Landlord: ... Oga Sagent, how much you want? (SE: *Sergeant boss, how much do you want?*)

⁴⁸⁴ SE is Standardized English

Sajent: Good una get sense. Each dead body na three hundred naira. Say I come look for them, two hundred naira.⁴⁸⁵ (SE: *Good you all are sensible. Each of the corpse cost three hundred. You have to pay another Two hundred naira because I found them here.*)

Within the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) is what we can refer to as “systemic corruption.”⁴⁸⁶ Many of the leaders of the force are corrupt, thereby, affecting the other personel’s moral for uprightness. Sajent (Sergeant) is the representation of systemic corruption within the Nigerian Police Force. He sets a price on criminal cases: the seriousness of the crime determines the price in financial terms:

Sajent: Wait, den say I write the report, another two hundred naira. One thousand naira na him I go collect for dis case.⁴⁸⁷ (SE: *Stop, the fact that I write the report, another two hundred. I must be paid One thousand naira for this very case.*)

Sajent will also set a price on his service as the police officer in charge of the case involving two murder victims. The One thousand Naira (N1000.00) equivalent of \$10 is to cover the cost of each of the victims set at three hundred, two hundred for his effort of discovering the bodies himself and the remaining two hundred naira in order for him to write a report that will exonerate the suspects rather than indict them. Danger and Baba Tailor are the two remaining characters of the play. Danger, a young man of twenty years old, is a violent criminal whose stocks-in-trade are robbery and assault. He is a representation of the decay and violence that the unemployed youth of Nigeria have become associated with. Danger just as his name typifies, has no regard for anyone except Lizi, his girlfriend, whom he calls “my sweet potato.”⁴⁸⁸ Lizi is the only person that can calm his raging spirit, especially when he becomes violent. He patronizes prostitutes, and he is always ready to kill for any amount:

⁴⁸⁵ Yerima, *The Lottery Ticket*, 46

⁴⁸⁶ Robert Klitgaard says that the term is used to distinguish two situations. One is where some people are corrupt. Another is where many people are corrupt—where the system itself has grown sick. The situation in Nigeria is that NPF as grown sick. See Klitgaard, Robert, “Leadership Under Systemic Corruption” a paper presented to six Mekong Delta countries at a summit meeting in Vientiane, Laos, December 2004

http://www.cgu.edu/include/Leadership_Under_System_Corruption_12-04.pdf

⁴⁸⁷ Yerima, *The Lottery Ticket*, 47

⁴⁸⁸ Yerima, *The Lottery Ticket*, 21

Danger: Na not-nine-not self even tug go dey use. I fit just hold the telefon say make dem wet one man with petrol, or burn one opponent shop. I tell you tief na tief. As politics dey go nuclear, na so tug work go go nuclear. As my man dey swear oath to chop Nigeria for Aso rock na so me too go dey swear to chop de man.⁴⁸⁹ (SE: *Criminal will use mobile 090 mobile phone line. I might use the phone to command my boys to pour fuel on a political opponent's shop. A thief is a thief. In as much as politics is becoming vibrant, so is criminality. Just as my political boss is taking his oath of office in Aso Rock to drain Nigeria of its wealth, I will also take my own oath to drain the man of his loot.*)

Danger becomes a ready tool in the hands of unscrupulous Nigerian politicians to perpetuate their nefarious deeds of killing, maiming and destroying political rivals. As Danger rightly points out, Nigerian political leaders' oath of office is geared towards "... to chop Nigeria for Aso rock..."⁴⁹⁰ In this case since Aso Rock is the official resident of the Nigerian president, Danger is saying that those who have been occupying this position are thieves whose sole purpose in government is to steal the wealth of the country. Danger's death in the play suggests that crime and hooliganism will come to an end only when the people collectively rise against it. Baba Tailor is a seventy-year-old sickly tailor whose uprightness is rewarded with the winning prize of the Tuba Cola Lottery. As a sickly and good hearted-man, his character represents a great deal of poverty. His presumed death by the other characters in the play put a new twist to the narration. At their supposition, the greed in the other characters manifests: even Baba Tailor who suddenly regains consciousness, heightened the greed in all the characters when the first thing said by him is "Wey my ticket? Where I put am?"⁴⁹¹ (SE: *Where is my ticket? Where did I drop it?*)

Language

In his plays, language is used to represent the multi-layered Nigerian society; he gives expression to a sense of increasing disgust and unrest within its population. The language in *The Lottery Ticket* is the popular Nigerian Pidgin English or NPE, a synthesized or creolized style of the English language. It is popular in Nigeria because it is spoken by almost all of the population. The language allows for the inclusion of indigenous languages into a simplified

⁴⁸⁹ Yerima, *The Lottery Ticket*, 29

⁴⁹⁰ SE: To embezzle Nigeria's wealth at the government's official residence.

⁴⁹¹ Yerima, *The Lottery Ticket*, 50

English language in order to give the speaker ease of expression and comprehension of communication among the various strata of the Nigerian society. In order to reach a new audience in theatre,⁴⁹² Yerima adopted the synthesized English language (NPE), which Biodun Jeyifo had observed earlier in some of Wole Soyinka's plays:

Perhaps the most impressive of Soyinka's feats of entering into, inhabiting and then appropriating the "languages" internal to a particular social group that is distant from his own middle-class background are to be encountered in *The Road* and *From Zia with Love*. In both plays, there is a complete hermeticization of the milieu of the lumpen, semi-employed and working class characters, together with the "world" of their social and demographic neighbor, the criminal underclass of extortion racketeers, jailbird felons and petty crooks. Indeed, on the strength of these two plays, not to talk of the two "*Jero Plays*" Soyinka must be ranked with the late Ken Saro-Wiwa as one of the two most accomplished creative translators of West African [P]idgin English into a highly nuanced literary language.⁴⁹³

Nigeria is a nation of diverse ethnic nationalities and languages (in the excess of 300 different tongues) with very high numbers of non-English language speakers. The synthesized English breaks the ethnic gulf and also allows for barrier breakage between the high and the low within the society. For citizens without formal education or easy access to higher education (even those with higher education), picking up a few words of English and mixing it with elements of their native tongues has been a much easier way of communicating across cultures and class.

Average Nigerians look at Pidgin English as a recognized language in its own right, with sufficient differences in vocabulary and structure which distinguish it from standardized English. Ogaga Okuyade believes that Nigerian "Pidgin English is the medium of expression, a language whose syntax is wholly African, while most of its vocabulary is premised on lexical borrowing

⁴⁹² It is argued by some African theatre scholars that the elitist nature and over dependence on sophisticated English language by the continent's literary dramatists are parts of the many reasons for the low attendance at theatre venues in Nigeria.

⁴⁹³ Jeyifo, Biodun, *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Postcolonialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 103

from English and indigenous languages.”⁴⁹⁴ The beauty of the language is that it is fluid and does not follow any stylistic form or rigid structure. There is no doubt that a form of pidgin language may have evolved between the Yoruba, Benin and their earlier European traders like the Portuguese, with whom they came in contact in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in order to facilitate effective trading relations. K.U. Ihemere believes that words like *Sabi* (know) and *Pikin* (child)⁴⁹⁵ found in the contemporary NPE have a Portuguese origin. Based on my little knowledge of the French language, I have also discovered that words like *Boku* (much/many) have a French origin. Pidgin English on its own had a long history with Nigerians having been adopted as far back as the early nineteenth century.⁴⁹⁶

The present NPE, however, became popular in Nigerian literature through the works of Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe at the turn of the 1960s and in music by the late Fela Anikulapo-Kuti Afrobeat music creator in the late 1960s. If we take into reckoning the year of publication for Wole Soyinka’s *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1960) and *The Road* (1965), and Chinua Achebe’s *Man of the People* (1967) that are written in NPE, then one can justifiably credit these two writers as the first set of people to document the language for popular culture and not Fela Anikulapo-Kuti whose Afrobeat music did not appear until late 1960s or Ken Saro-Wiwa whose writing career commenced in the 1970s and, as claimed by some critics⁴⁹⁷, brought NPE language to international limelight. For elucidation I will reproduce Samson’s speech from *The Road* which brand of Pidgin English contains Yoruba, pidgin and many other English varieties:

⁴⁹⁴ Ogaga, Okuyade, “Recent Nigerian Bards and Minstrels: Forms of Counter Narratives” in *California Linguistic Notes*, Vol. 35, No. 2, Spring 2010 (online)

⁴⁹⁵ Ihemere, K.U., “A Basic Description and Analytic Treatment of Noun Clauses in Nigerian Pidgin” in *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 3, (2006), 296-313. After I crosschecked these two Portuguese words against English, I discovered that *Sabi* is saber and there is no such word as *Pikin* in Portuguese language.

⁴⁹⁶ Magnus Hubber calls this form of language English-lexicon Jargon which is likely to have developed in Western Nigeria in the 1860s with the establishment of the Lagos colony and the increased presence of the Anglophone Europeans officials. Hubber, M., *Ghanaian Pidgin English in its West African Context: A Sociohistorical and Structural Analysis* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin B.V., 1999), 125

⁴⁹⁷ Ahmed Yerima in his *Discourse on Tragedy* (2009, 60) writes that Fela Anikulapo-Kuti popularized the language while Biodun Jeyifo, which I have quoted above recognizes Ken Saro-Wiwa and Wole Soyinka as the two most accomplished translator of NPE. Achebe and Soyinka’s use of NPE is limited to specific characters in their work, whereas in Saro-wiwa’s works, all the characters speak the NPE.

Samson: Sisi! A-ah. Sisi o. Sisi wey fine reach so na only bus wey fine like we own fit carry am. Wetin now sisi? Oh your portamentaeu, I done put am inside bus. Yes, certainly. We na quick service, we na senior service...Oyo, mama, we done ready for go now now. Come-o come now. Service na first class, everything provided. If you want' pee we go stop. No delay!

In the drama of Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and others that later emerged from Nigeria after this first generation playwrights, NPE becomes a meansto distinguish between the literate or sophisticated characters and the illiterate, most especially the house-help or market women's characters, for example, Polycarp the house boy of Lejoka Brown in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, and Chume, Jero's assistant in Soyinka's *Jero Plays*. The language also distinguishes the criminal underclass of extortion racketeers, jailbird felons, thugs and petty crooks like Danger in *The Lottery Ticket*. In the long playing album titled, "Unlimited Liability Company"⁴⁹⁸ which also featured in the film *Blues for a Prodigal* (1984), Soyinka composed the song in Pidgin English and had it recorded:

I love my country	<i>I love my country</i>
I no go lie	<i>I will not lie</i>
Na inside am I go live and I die	<i>I will live and die in it</i>
A no my country	<i>I am aware of my country</i>
A no go lie	<i>I will not lie</i>
Na him and me go yab till I die	<i>myself and my country shall argue until I die</i>

Yerima incorporated this song also in *Kaffir's Last Game*⁴⁹⁹, and he adopted the same style in the composition of the Tuba Cola promotional advert in *The Lottery Ticket*:

⁴⁹⁸ The songs in the album are written by Wole Soyinka who also produced them through his company Ewuro Production, however, it has the voice of Tunji Oyelana and his musical group The Benders. Ewuro Productions also produced the film *Blues for a Prodigal*

⁴⁹⁹ Yerima, Ahmed, *Kaffir's Last Game*, 25

“Tuba Cola don come again oh!	<i>Tuba Cola has arrived again</i>
Yeah! Come see naira, yanfu yanfu	<i>Come and see naira in large amount</i>
One hundred thousand naira Naira rain dey fall oh!	<i>Naira rain is falling</i>
“Tuba Cola don come oh!	<i>Tuba Cola has arrived</i>
Na today we go know oh!	<i>We will know today</i>
All the people wey don buy lottery ticket	<i>Those who already bought the lottery ticket</i>
Na today result go come out for ten o’clock	<i>The result will be out today at 10 o’clock</i>
Woman, men, pikin wey dey drink Tuba	<i>Women, men and child that drinks</i>
Tuba Cola go collect plenty money	<i>Tuba Cola will get a lot of money</i>
Buy one bottle collect plenty money	<i>Buy one bottle, receive a lot of money</i>

Yerima, aware of the popularity of NPE as a tool for effective communication and the class of people who frequently utilize it in everyday conversation with comical rendition without inhibition, put the reader-audience in a hilarious mood from the opening of the play with the Tuba Cola lottery jingle. Yerima’s use of language buttresses my earlier statement that NPE is a barrier breaker which did not distinguish between classes and educational attainment of speakers; Yerima belongs to the upper middle-class of the Nigerian society. Having been to the university, schooled at a prestigious college in the UK, a university lecturer and Director-General of the National Theatre, a political appointee, ought to remove Yerima from the level of NPE speakers. However, this is never the case. One can argue that since NPE language is very popular within Nigerian universities, he may have picked it up from there or from the popular place of convergence “Abe Igi” (under the trees) at the National Theatre. Yerima explained that in being a child of a police officer, it was a must for him to understand NPE because it is the language spoken in Nigerian police barracks. Therefore, anyone who grew up in that environment is bound

to speak it.⁵⁰⁰ His realistic presentation of the market and street language is exceptional, more flexible, musical and highly developed. Take for instance the dialogue between Mama Lizi, Lizi and Landlord:

Mama Lizi: But Tuba Cola people get sense. Dey wan sell plenty, den dem go give people one hundred thousand naira. See wayo. Dat one na money? Dey don make millions well well, den dem go give us only hundred thousand. Everybody na tief for dis kontri. Dey just dey punish poor man.

Landlord: Madam na money o. Nobody force anybody. Na you get your money, na you drink am.

Mama Lizi: Ha Oga Landlord. You wey God don bless. You get house for Lagos, you dey collect money, wetin you wan take hundred thousand naira do?

Landlord: I go take am marry your Lizi. I don old, I need small girl wey go dey rob my back till I die.

Mama Lizi: Heeh, so na your hidden agenda be dat? Men self, wayo full una head.

Lizi: God forbid.

Landlord: Wetin God wan forbid? E good say since my wife run commot for house run follow that yeye 419 boy wey god don soda him yansh, e good say make I sit down dey look ayanyan? ...Lizi good. Na you go bury me.

Lizi: I say God forbid. I no go bury oldman. God forbid! No be me go do replacement wife for you. You dey forget say I train as tailor.⁵⁰¹

This triangular conversation is full of witty remarks, puns, innuendoes and hyperbolic statements on the part of the Landlord and Mama Lizi. These figures of speech enhance the comical nature of the play. When Mama Lizi asks what Landlord is going to do with a Hundred Thousand Naira (N100,000.00) an equivalent of Six Hundred and Fifty-five United State dollars (\$655), Landlord, who had been lusting after Lizi promptly responds with "I go take am marry your Lizi."⁵⁰² Landlord's quick response was not lost on Mama Lizi who also accused him of nursing such a hidden agenda all along and ranking all men together to be full of deceit:

⁵⁰⁰ The statement was made during an interview with this writer on 10th November, 2011 at Redeemer's University (RUN), Nigeria.

⁵⁰¹ Yerima, *The Lottery Ticket*, 10-11

⁵⁰² SE: *I will marry Lizzie with the money*.

Heeh, so na your hidden aganda be dat? Men self, wayo full una head⁵⁰³. (SE: *You mean that is your hidden plan?*)

Lizi rejects Landlord's offer of marriage and he goes into the story of how his wife left him to go after a useless fraudster "yeye 419 boy" (*stupid fraudster*). Other comical words used by Landlord here include "god don soda him yansh" (*god has sealed his anus*), and "ayanyan" (*empty space*). Being aware through experience of how to get the attention of Lizi and her mother, Landlord reveals his intention for mother and daughter, a plan that he has no desire to fulfill:

...Na him I dey talk, if you gree my own, when I win I go pay your dowry. We no go go church. I go drive Electrician commot the shop wey dey Ebute-Metta. I go put you there. I go buy you Tokunbo sewing machine and your mama no go pay rent again.⁵⁰⁴ (SE: *That is what I am talking about, if you agreed to be my wife, I will pay your dowry when I win the lottery. We don't have to go to Church. I will send the Electrical worker in the Shop at Ebute-Metta away. You will occupy the space. Then I will buy a used sewing machine for you, then you mother will cease to pay rent for this space she occupies.*)

This bait which Mama Lizi easily falls for does not elicit equal reaction from Lizi who is already in love with Danger, a noted chronic criminal. She only said Landlord should first of all win the lottery before making plans of marrying her. Landlord who is very optimistic of winning the lottery after collecting eight packets of tickets, wants to marry Lizi with the winnings:

Lizi: (Lizi walks to him) Make I bring your food? (SE: *Shall I bring your meal now?*)

Landlord: Yes Sugar!

Lizi: Na as you chop am yesterday? (SE: *Do you want it the same way you ate it yesterday?*)

Landlord: Yes honey!

Lizi: Water? Or Tuba Cola?

Landlord: Tuba Cola, Orange Banana of my nose.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰³ This is a Hausa word meaning deceit.

⁵⁰⁴ Yerima, *The Lottery Ticket*, 11

⁵⁰⁵ Yerima, *The Lottery Ticket*, 14

Landlord employs every known trick within his domain to entice Lizi, even referring to her as his most loved fruit. Jargon is used to elicit laughter from the reader-audience. Of course, Landlord's intension is not lost on Lizi, so she insisted that he should win the lottery first. When he realizes that Lizi is not ready to leave her boyfriend, Danger, Landlord changes his approach by warning her of the danger in going ahead to commit her life to a common criminal:

Lizi wetin you think? No dig hole wey rabbit no dey. I be sure banka make you follow me o. you wan suffer follow that tief tief boy. Man wey dem dey call Danger na man?⁵⁰⁶ (SE: *Lizi, what do you think? Do not embark on a fruitless venture. It is certain I will win you need to come with me. You will be badly treated by the criminal you are following. Is the man called Danger a person?*)

Two important statements in the speech are: "No dig hole wey rabbit no dey"⁵⁰⁷, and "Man wey dem dey call Danger na man?"⁵⁰⁸ The first one is a figurative expression used in advising someone not to embark on pointless venture, while the second one is a rhetorical question. The first "man" is used in its literary sense whereas the second "man" is in relation to the word danger as not being human. The conversation between Landlord, Mama Lizi, and Baba Tailor is even more hilarious. Though it relates to death and sickness, one still feels the lightness at which it is discussed:

Baba Tailor: I sick no be small. (SE: *I had a terrible sickness*)

Landlord: Na die we even hear. (SE: *We heard that you died*)

Baba Tailor: I die, but God no call am my time. I see death, na man. I see my mama and papa, dem dey call me. Adolfos come. Na him I remember my shop. I say I still get mission and I refuse to follow them.⁵⁰⁹

(SE: *I died, but God says it is not my turn yet. I saw death, it is a male. I saw my mother and father, they both called me by my name, Adolfos. However, I remember my shop. And I told them I have a mission on earth, so, I refused to go with them.*)

⁵⁰⁶ Yerima, *The Lottery Ticket*, 14

⁵⁰⁷ The meaning of the statement is, "do not embark on a fruitless venture."

⁵⁰⁸ The meaning of the question is, "man that people refers to as Danger is not a human-being."

⁵⁰⁹ Yerima, Ahmed, *The Lottery Ticket*, 16

Mama Lizi was quick to ask from Baba Tailor if it is possible for a dead person to recognize anybody in heaven, to which the man responded in the affirmative. Baba Tailor described his experiences in “the supposed visitation” heaven as pleasant since the place is pleasant and sweet to be at. Here, I think Baba Tailor is only re-echoing what the Bible⁵¹⁰ says concerning heaven as a place of happiness. Mama Lizi, not satisfied with Baba Tailor’s response, retorted:

Eeh if death sweet why you no kuku die well now? Shebi you for just leave all dis wahala die well well. You say you get mission. Dey deceive yourself. Which mission poor man dey get pass suffer head?⁵¹¹
(SE: *But if truly death is pleasant, why did you not die finally? It means that you would have left this earth with its numerous problems.*)

She is not being unnecessarily hard on Baba Tailor, but re-echoing a normal response that would have come from an average Nigerian within the social class being discussed. That is “If the state of death is as sweet as you proclaimed, why come back to earth”? “Suffer head” is used to explain a state of poverty. One will have to say that Mama Lizi’s remark to Baba Tailor is later justified when he (Baba Tailor) starts to list the different kinds of sickness he is diagnosed to be suffering from:

Diabetis, atiritis, hanpertension, high blood pressure and heart problem⁵¹² (SE: *Diabetes, arthritis, hypertension.*)

Mama Lizi again reprimands Baba Tailor for leaving heaven to come back to earth:

I say wetin come remain for life for you? If Doctor tell me say I get all dis sickness and my mama dey call me for heaven, I for kuku stay.⁵¹³
(SE: *I repeat what else do you have on earth? If a doctor diagnosed that I am suffering from the entire ailment you mentioned, and my mother beckons to me in heaven, I will stay with her.*)

⁵¹⁰ See John accounts in the book of Revelation, and Jesus Christ words on the many mansions in heaven in the book of John 14.2

⁵¹¹ Yerima, *The Lottery Ticket*, 16

⁵¹² Yerima, *The Lottery Ticket*, 16

⁵¹³ Yerima, *The Lottery Ticket*, 17

Landlord introduces a humorous dimension to the sickness by giving a perceived general analysis of the sickness and causes:

See heen, diabetes na wen bigman don chop many sweet things. Atiritis na wen bigman sidown dey drive moto dey chase women. Which moto you get, pass pasenja for molue bus? Herpatension na wen you wori for account wey dey London, you wey be say na ajo you dey do. High blood na wen life sweet bigman and everything wey him dey do na highlife, e chop leg of chicken, he chop woman leg, wash am with odeku (*All laugh at Landlord's analysis*)⁵¹⁴ (SE: *You need to know that diabetes affects wealthy individuals who live life indulging in sweet foods. Arthritis affects the wealthy individual who spends most of his days sitting in a car chasing after women. What kind of car do you have that is more than a seat in a public transport bus? Hypertension comes when you give in to too much worrying about your savings account in London, but you only make a daily contribution to the thrift collector. High blood pressure only comes when a wealthy individual enjoys life to the maximum by eating chicken legs, woman legs, and relax with stout beer.*)

Landlord and Mama Lizi laugh at the sicknesses (Arthritis, Hypertension, Diabetes, High blood pressure and heart problem), which they both perceive as being meant to affect wealthy individuals, therefore, for Baba Taylor to be plagued by them, he must be a very wealthy man (bigman) in God's sight. The man (Baba Taylor) is quick to inform them that he owes bills at the hospital including the bills of some food vendors who had assisted with food while he was in the hospital. Landlord interprets Baba Taylor's sickness from the perspective of a deprived class of society: you can only develop hypertension when you constantly think of your bank accounts overseas, and to him, Baba Taylor's bank account is little daily contributions done in the market.

In Nigeria there are thrift collectors who go to food vendors, small traders and market women collecting some amount of money from them as a daily savings which they can always get back at the end of the month or whenever the need for it arises. This is the circumstance that Landlord refers to. He explains further that in order to be diagnosed with high blood pressure, the victim must be in the habit of excessive eating of chicken, sleeping around with women and drinking beers. Of course to the poor illiterate members of the

⁵¹⁴ Yerima, *The Lottery Ticket*, 17

lower class of the Nigerian society, the rich are plagued with many sicknesses because they indulge themselves a great deal without care for their health. Danger's NPE has fluidity, and it often means the reverse of what is stated. For example: "Oga Landlord. Alaye Baba, my rice and beans dey your hand this morning o"⁵¹⁵, would be translated, "Landlord, the boss. Area Father, the owner of the world, my meal this morning is in your hand", however the NPE means more than we have in English. Danger merely uses the words boss and owners of the world to praise Landlord expecting him to be drawn into the flattery before telling him that he (Landlord) is to pay for the food he (Danger) will be eating that morning. Conversely, the language in *The Sisters* and *Kaffir's Last Game* is elevated. The language is of highly educated characters laden with poetry, metaphor, sarcasm, allusion and other figurative expressions, even with philosophy. The language of most of these plays is determined by the social class of the characters. The three sisters are children of an ambassador, well educated (attended prestigious high schools and universities in England), and one of them is the widow of the late president. The language is not localized like we have in *Little Drops* and *Mojagbe*, or in Yerima's historical dramas like *The Trials of Oba Ovonramwen*, *Attahiru* and *Ameh Oboni The Great*, discussed in chapter two. Although we have, especially in *Kaffir's Last Game*, some words in both Afrikaans and Yoruba, these were meant to remind the reader-audience of the setting of the play and the background of the characters. The deployment of sarcasm in *Kaffir's Last Game* and *The Lottery Ticket* is intended to deride the human's hypocritical attitude and recourse to religious obligations, prayers and supplications to God. Nigerian type of Pentecostal Christianity is the most common brand of Christianity in Africa. Nigerian pastors are quick to establish churches wherever they are found in Africa, Europe or America. For example, Redeemed Christian Church of God and Mountain of Fire and Miracle Ministry, two of Nigerian's fastest growing churches, have a presence in Australia, North and South America, Europe, and in many countries of Africa. Professor is quick to refer to these activities in *Kaffir's Last Game* as a product being exported from Nigeria:

Professor: In fact, after oil, it is the recent second most popular product being shipped for export. And we are well-organized about it too. After committing all atrocities from Monday to Thursday, we spend Fridays and Sundays praying. We have so many churches, mosques and

⁵¹⁵ Yerima, *The Lottery Ticket*, 21

shrines. Sometimes I wonder how god has escaped being confused by our numerous supplications.⁵¹⁶

And Lizi comments in *The Lottery Ticket* "...Dey no wan work dem dey wait make Jesus come put water for them gari."⁵¹⁷ From the opening of *The Sisters* we are introduced to Taiwo's poetry which is very rich in imagery and metaphor. For example:

Dark embers of my inner soul
The drink lobes of sadness pour.
Melting, pelting ...dropping drops of tears
Wrapped once in stately glory,
Now naked in cloves of sorrow ...pity!
(Pauses, looks around
Oh the drink lobes of the rich and powerful
Must now tilt to pour out ...pour out
The innocence of a shaded life
Now searching for pity
Where there is none...pity!⁵¹⁸

I decided to write down the whole poem as Taiwo renders it in order to point out how Yerima departs from his simple and straight forward approach to dramatic dialogue to create deeper meaning with simple words and images. The first three lines of the poem convey the sadness that Taiwo harboured for years after the execution of her husband at the order of the president. The later part of the poem makes mockery of Funmi's expectations of pity at the death of her husband. She ends the poem with confirmation that she has no pity for Funmi in her state of loss. Taiwo is happy that the president died. The first two lines of the poem refer to Taiwo's long period of solitary grief, while line eight to ten refer to her current state of mind:

The innocence of a shaded life
Now searching for pity
Where there is none...pity⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁶ Yerima, *Kaffir's Last Game*, 33

⁵¹⁷ Yerima, *The Lottery Ticket*, 20. SE: The people do not want to work, but await Jesus Christ to put food on their table.

⁵¹⁸ Yerima, *The Sisters*, 9

⁵¹⁹ Yerima, *The Sisters*, 9

Taiwo sees the death of the president as her personal triumph as she blamed him for her many woes. The night that her husband was picked-up by the military for execution, she was shot at and the bullet broke her pelvis. From that moment she lost the use of her legs. At the hospital, neither Funmi nor the president visited her or paid for the treatment. By ordering the killing of her husband years earlier, the President brought Taiwo her untold sorrow:

I am sorry again. Besides, I did not want anyone to share in my supreme moment of glory. God had handed over the moment to me, and in triumph, I scribbled ...death ...oh death ...which breaks through the mighty walls ...of Egypt. Treks down the well-paved road to Jericho only to snap the neck of the almighty.⁵²⁰

Having used Taiwo's speech to describe the kind of language in *The Sisters*, let us examine Professor's and Mbulelo's dialogue in *Kaffir's Last Game*:

Mbulelo: I am sorry, but let me get this clear ...you mean that you a Professor of Political Science trained at Oxford, London and Cambridge lost your wife to a lottery ticket?

Professor: No, to an America Professor. My God these American people ...

Mbulelo: Permit me to cut in, Professsor. The Americans are not a people. They have lost that status and description. They are just Americans. If you think of them just as Americans, then their action will never hurt. Look at Libya. Even now they want to tell President Mandela who to shake or visit. I tell you they are not a people.⁵²¹

Mbulelo equates Americans with their country. The understanding in many African countries is that the United States of America (USA) controls the economy and political sphere of Africa. Mbulelo's reference to Libya is in relation to the sanctions that the US placed on the country from 1980s to 2000s. Both Mbulelo and Professor believe that, in order for your country to enjoy the support of the government of USA, your nation's president must maintain relations only with nations that are in good relationship with the US.

⁵²⁰ Yerima, *The Sisters*, 11

⁵²¹ Yerima, *Kaffir's Last Game*, 17

Professor: They also did that to us. And our government cannot stomach their political machinations and intrigues also. The African [p]residents, no matter what aids they get, must begin to assert themselves.⁵²²

In *Little Drops*, neither the terror activities of the various militant groups in the Niger Delta nor that of the Nigerian Military Joint Task Force (JTF) is shrouded in metaphors like we have in Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground* or Akpos Adesi's *Agadagba Warriors* and other plays about Nigeria's socio-political landscape.⁵²³ For example, the militant boys blew up oil refineries and killed their own people including leaders in *Little Drops*. In Niger Delta, there was constant bombing of oil installations, and kidnapping of expatriate oil workers for ransom. All these are captured in *Little Drops*. He uses Azue's description of how the militants beheaded their king to reveal that the groups have constituted themselves into an uncontrollable institution of terror: "They cut off the head of the king right in front of his family."⁵²⁴ Azue shows her grief not by simple words but through the gory picture of the king's death:

Azue: ...the king died like an animal at the shrines. The eyes of his headless body still twitched with life. His stomach rising and falling as blood gushed out from his headless neck....No man deserved to have died like that. They killed him like an animal for sacrifice.⁵²⁵

The horrid image of death and mangled bodies in *Little Drops* is distressing to both the actors and the play's reader-audience; however it enhances the tragic mood of the play. Let us take for instance, Bonuwo's psychological wellbeing when she lost her students:

...I ran out when I heard screams and shouts. First, it was like a bad dream. The roof of my classroom was blown open. Huge smoke and heavy smell of charred skin and burnt flesh. Not one soul ... not one child was spared. All we saw were cut off limbs, little trunks, cut off heads, with their hair still burningforty-one of them ...all dead.⁵²⁶

⁵²² Yerima, *Kaffir's Last Game*, 17

⁵²³ In *Hard Ground* and *Agadagba Warriors*, there is no direct mention of Nigeria or JTF.

⁵²⁴ Yerima, *Little Drops*, 22

⁵²⁵ Yerima, *Little Drops*, 23-24

⁵²⁶ Yerima, *Little Drops*, 39

Bonuwo ran out of the toilet on hearing agonizing screams. She saw what used to be a classroom now turned into an open field. Psychologically, she became unbalanced. The burnt flesh and charred skin, cut off limbs, and heads of forty-one innocent children—who were unaware of the ongoing war or the cause of it or whose war it is anyway—churned her stomach. Bonuwo’s predicament did not end with the experience of the bomb blast; the parents of the murdered children blamed her for their children’s death. This must have accounted for her seeing the images of the slain children at a point in the play. Bonuwo’s description of the manner of death of the children provoked the humanness of the audience who saw the play when it was premiered in Lagos.⁵²⁷ Memekize recounts her ordeal with a gory description of how she lost all her family in one day as a poor fisherwoman in the swamp of the Niger Delta during the Nigerian Civil War which claimed over a million people between 1967 and 1970:

Memekize: All my blood. My husband and two sons. They all perished the same day. During the Biafran war ...unknown to us there was a war. How were we to know in this swampy bush? As they jumped in and out of the river, diving...checking the nets ...*dugum!* A shell. It tore them to pieces. I never picked one complete. I found a head there ...a limb here ...a toe ...a finger ...a manacled trunks. In the rain, I picked each piece until I had each wooden box full.⁵²⁸

Memekize’s reference to the Nigerian Civil War is to tell us that Nigeria as a country is not new to carnage and war, perpetrated by political leaders as an alternative for a peaceful dialogue approach to conflict management or resolution. Her plight further highlights the point that, in the event of war, the victims are mostly civilians who have no knowledge of the cause of the war. If Mukume suffers rape three times in *Little Drops*, and the other women and children suffered uncountable humiliation and deprivation in the hands of their perceived revolutionists, then it is important for me to ask: “Who are the militants fighting for?” The militants themselves are quick to respond that they are fighting for the people, especially the women, children and youths. The actions of the militant groups confuse the women and children they claim to be protecting. In the play we have these two positions interpreted by Ovievie and Kuru:

⁵²⁷ The play was premiered in November, 2009 at the Nigerian National Theatre, Lagos. In the audience were many high school and university students. I saw many of the audience crying during the performance, especially during Bonuwo and Azue’s speech.

⁵²⁸ Yerima, *Little Drops*, 34

Ovievie:No. There was no way one could seat on the fence. No. You could not watch the world exploit your people. With so much neglect, you could not turn your face away. We all felt a sense of duty. We had to fight.⁵²⁹

On the other hand, the militant leader Kuru believes that the women should be active in the fight against the Nigerian Government and the oil multi-nationals or else he will kill them:

...Shoo! Is this a women colony? Wake them up. We men are fighting, you women are sleeping. Wake up the stupid fools!⁵³⁰

....I will skin you all alive, hang you upside down on a pole each, and prick a little hole in your chest until you all die by dropping little drops of blood to the progress and development of the Niger Delta Republic....We are at war out there. Dying for you! But here you are. (Look around.) Eating water yam.⁵³¹

Yerima seems to be saying that Kuru stands as symbol for the militants whose concern is the achievement of a Niger Delta Republic. To actualize this desire, they find that the deaths of both children and women are justified and inevitable. On the contrary, the Niger Delta women choose peace instead of war, life instead of death; because they are aware that, in the course of wars, the female gender is hardest hit: "We have not sent anyone to kill and die for us. We want peace. We are tired of burying our beloved ones...."⁵³² The effect of the Niger Delta militants' activities against women is not different from what female groups encounter under any war situation. The women's psychological integrity is often destroyed by heinous acts such as rape and other sexual violence which often results in unwanted pregnancies and enforced termination of pregnancy. Women are most often seen as loot of war and the instrument of pleasure for the male fighters. Even under the Niger Delta insurgency when the militants are "paid ransom for the release of the kidnapped, they spend it partying with young women."⁵³³ So, according to Memekize, "...women and the innocent children will always lose their lives."⁵³⁴ The International Committee of the

⁵²⁹ Yerima, *Little Drops*, 48

⁵³⁰ Yerima, *Little Drops*, 51

⁵³¹ Yerima, *Little Drops*, 52

⁵³² Yerima, *Little Drops*, 52

⁵³³ Yerima, *Little Drops*, 21

⁵³⁴ Yerima, *Little Drops*, 63

Red Cross organization writes that women are, in most part, the civilian “caught in the crossfire, and show astonishing resourcefulness and resilience in coping with the disintegration of their families, the loss of their homes and their belongings and the destruction of their lives.”⁵³⁵

The details of death in the play literarily present horrific images that are often seen in scenes of Hollywood war movies, terrorist actions in the streets of Iraq, or the outcome of an explosion that rocked Moscow Domodedovo airport on January 24, 2011.⁵³⁶ They present a devilment angle to humanity’s insane application of power. The action removes from the perpetrators any ounce of humanity they once might have had. In *Little Drops*, the reader-audience relates with death not in its orthodox form, but as a tragic end to existence and also as an instrument of destruction of innocent lives. Death becomes the method for settling resource control issues both by the Nigerian government and the militants. Whatever sympathy the reader-audience might have felt towards the militants disappears by their continual killings. I think this is what Yerima’s *Little Drops* wants to achieve. The play puts the blame of the conflicts and the carnage that follows on the militants and exonerates the Nigerian government to a large extent. However, while the militants are the people responsible for the killing of the king in *Little Drop*, the Joint Military Taskforce who launches a grenade attack on the militants are responsible for the massacre of innocent children.

The language of the play shocks, affects and effects an offensive emotional reaction that necessitated an unsympathetic condemnation of both the actions of the militants and the government forces by the reader-audience. Memekize’s recounts of her loss in the Nigerian Civil War of the late 1960s that confines her to the same spot for forty years after the incident employs language not different from the others in the play. The reference to the manner in which the King died like sacrificial animals at shrines is too atrocious. I think Yerima’s use of the statement “The eyes of his headless body still twitched with life” and the description of the death of the children is aimed at telling the warring parties that they have thrown away the little humanity existing in them.

⁵³⁵ See paragraph two of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) official statement

⁵³⁶ Vasilyeva, N., Sekretarev, I., “Moscow airport terror attack kills 31, wounds 145”

http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/eu_russia_airport_blast

Thematic Pre-occupation

Gender abuse is one of the major themes in *The Sisters*, *Little Drops* and *Mojagbe*. All of the women in these plays are denied one right or another. For example, Funmi, the first lady in *The Sisters*, suffers the agony of the loss of her sisters' companionship when the president was alive. Her husband prevented her from visiting Taiwo in the hospital when she received a bullet to her pelvis. She could not commiserate with her on the death of her husband. Nana was treated by her Father the Ambassador and his wife as a servant rather than as a member of the family. This is the reason why Ambassador's wife demanded that Nana should serve her sisters as a servant. She was warned never to reveal her real identity to them. If not for the clause in the Ambassador's will, Nana's identity will not have come to light. The will states that the three sisters (Funmi, Toun, and Taiwo) must discover the identity of their fourth sister who is the oldest before the properties can be shared.

For Oba Mojagbe, women are properties to be acquired and an instrument of sex. As a property they can be put away anytime the owner (male) desires so. This is why Mojagbe used his women for sacrifice. In order to attain immortality, he killed his first wife and his own mother for sacrifice. With his supernatural power, he blocked the womb of the new Olori (queen). Because he has blocked her womb, she will not be able to have a child of her own:

Mojagbe: And that one, too. She now wants children ... I see her drinking concoction and whispering incantations in my room before coming to bed. Often she cries out in her sleep. ...⁵³⁷

Though Mojagbe is happy that Olori will not give birth to a child, she, on the other hand is traumatized by her inability to have a child. She suffers constant nightmares in which she sees Isepe, the medicine man of Mojagbe, killing her unborn children:

Olori: The Baba that I saw said as long as your man, Isepe, lives, my womb is sealed. (Crying)....Why would he want to stop my children from coming? ...⁵³⁸

Olori's desire for a child that will continue the lineage of Mojagbe leads her to consult a medicine man. The man whom she refers to as Baba makes her drink

⁵³⁷ Yerima, *Mojagbe*, 23

⁵³⁸ Yerima, *Mojagbe*, 54

different herbal preparations. Her desire is rooted in the belief among the Yoruba's that a man or woman without a child is like a pot that cannot contain water. His or her root will wither off the surface of the earth after a while. Though there is no logic in the statement, it still holds strongly among the people. Motunrayo, who becomes the symbol of death in the play, is regarded by Mojagbe as a slave girl whose purpose is for sexual gratification and as a shrine-hand (someone who attends to the shrine gods aside the priest). Mojagbe abuses the sensibility of the women of the community by letting slaves loose to go and rape them for daring to protest against his kingship half-naked:

Mojagbe: Take six strong and virile slaves. Let them loose amongst the half-naked women. And if they desire older women like my mothers' here, they can have them....⁵³⁹

Mojagbe's action is not different from those who raped Mukume the night of her wedding:

Mukume: ...Please! I have been raped three times today already. Kill me instead. Shoot me and let me die! (Crying.) No! I will not let another man touch me. Kill me first.⁵⁴⁰

As a casualty of terror activities who constantly lives in fear of what might happen next, Mukume refuses to plead for her life; instead, she wishes for death as she thinks of life in the hands of another militant after being dehumanized by those she encountered earlier.

Despite the level of abuse suffered by the women in *Little Drop* and *The Sister*, they still desire men. Even the level of academic attainment of the women in *The Sister* cannot extricate them from abuse. Though Taiwo's pain and past abuse becomes the driving force for her survival, others refuse to get out of the shackles of male domination or male controlled space. Even in *Little Drops*, apart from the old woman, Memekize, the rest of the women align with their torturer (represented in Kuru) in the end and continue as if everything is normal. Funmi in *The Sisters*, Azue in *Little Drops*, and Olori in Mojagbe rely on the status of being married and on the insulation provided by their office as the wives of the paramount rulers. Because of the economic cover which their

⁵³⁹ Yerima, *Mojagbe*, 37

⁵⁴⁰ Yerima, *Little Drops*, 10

marriages provide, they are likely to accept whatever abuse that might come from their husbands.

The major issues discussed in *Kaffir's Last Game* are brain drain, betrayal and patriotism. The migration of the skilled laborers or highly educated members of a particular society to a foreign land where it is believed that they can have better living conditions is what I refer to as brain drain. Yerima's choice of a character like Professor is not an accident. It is to draw attention to the fact that many renowned academics in Nigeria have relocated to universities in the United State of America, Canada, Europe, and South Africa with the intention of finding a better environment for research and remuneration of service. Greed is the main theme of *The Lottery Ticket* as death and betrayal are the main subjects in *Mojagbe*, *The Sisters*, and *Little Drops*. Danger's greed pushes him to make attempt on Mama Lizi's life in order to get Baba Tailor's winning ticket. The same greed binds all the characters of the play together to consider the death of Danger in the hand of Mama Lizi as normal. This is because Danger's death removes him from the number of people that will share the lottery. A common theme prevalent in all the plays is corruption (both of power and of resources). The telluric women in *Mojagbe* were the people who manipulated the people's choice of a King by presenting *Mojagbe* as the people's choice on the contrary:

Mojagbe: [...] ... the people begged me to become king.

Yeye: We know how that water entered the coconut. Leave that story alone. It is what you became that spoiled the taste ...pity.⁵⁴¹

Among the Yorubas, the source of the water found in the coconut is a mystery. The fact that the four telluric Yeye are powerful manipulators and mischievous elements make them the people behind the mystery of how the "water entered the coconut." In this case, both water and coconut are metaphors for secrecy.

Religious charlatanism is a subject in both *Kaffir's Last Game* and *The Lottery Ticket*. Nigeria is a nation of profuse contradiction, a place where religious piety and corruption cohabit simultaneously as the following dialogue between Professor and Mbulelo in *Kaffir's Last Game* reveals:

Professor: ...We in Nigeria are a very prayerful people. Even a former president of ours wondered how, with the bad economy and all, the country still survived. It was prayers.

⁵⁴¹ Yerima, *Mojagbe*, 36

Mbulelo: Prayers. That is a new one on me.⁵⁴²

Nigerians' recourse to prayer as mediation for solving social, political and economic problems is also a major issue in *The Lottery Ticket*, "Na as Muslim dey beg, Christian dey beg."⁵⁴³ They pray for material needs rather for spiritual sanctity. Lizi narrates an experience that, at a Sunday service, a church member who claims to be possessed by the spirit was poured a bucket of water to drive away the spirit. She recalls the number of a car to warn the owner of an impending danger and the people, including the Pastor, were disappointed as they thought the numbers were for the lottery. All of the characters in *The Lottery Ticket*, apart from Lizi, will kill to be the receiver of the lottery jackpot, the subject on which the play revolves. As a measure, Mama Lizi is ready to prostitute her only daughter as long as the old Landlord will exempt her from paying house rent. She is quick to justify herself by calling it a "business" opportunity when Landlord suggested marrying Lizi:

Mama Lizi: Lizi if oga Landlord serious, say I no go pay rent, abeg make you give am eye small.

Lizi: Mama!

Mama Lizi: Na business me I dey.⁵⁴⁴

As political satires, *Kaffir's Last Game* and *The Lottery Ticket* make mockery in a lucid manner of the pretentious religious fanaticism and double standards of the government.

Socio-Political Contextualization of Texts

Mojagbe: (With disgust.) A cricket ... a common cricket fit for food for the wall gecko ... a common lizard comes to the palace to kill a king. (Walks round him.) A childish fool!⁵⁴⁵

In *Mojagbe*, Prince Esan's attempts to assassinate King Mojagbe in his palace fail. For his action, Prince Esan is condemned to death in the market square to serve as a deterrent to others who may want to attempt the same act. Esan can

⁵⁴² Yerima, *Kaffir's Last Game*, 33

⁵⁴³ SE: The Muslims are praying the same way the Christians are praying. Yerima, *The Lottery Ticket*, 19

⁵⁴⁴ Yerima, *The Lottery Ticket*, 11

⁵⁴⁵ Yerima, *Mojagbe*, 15

carry the title of prince because he has right to the throne as he comes from the same part of the kingdom as Mojagbe.

The action of Esan is similar to what happened in Nigeria under the Military government. For example, General Yakubu Gowon - who profited from the nation's coup and counter coup of 1966 - ruled for nine years promising to hand over to a democratically elected government on many occasions before he was finally overthrown by General Murtala Mohammed in a coup-d'état in 1975. General Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993), who overthrew the government of General Mohammadu Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon (1983-1985), ruled the country for eight years with various failed attempts at handing over to a democratically elected government. Even when he had conducted an election that was adjudged as the freest and fairest in the annal of Nigeria's history, he would not leave until he was forced to hand over to an interim government headed by Chief Ernest Sonekan.⁵⁴⁶ Gen. Sanni Abacha, before his untimely death after four years in office, was planning to transit into a civilian President.⁵⁴⁷ Nigeria's latest attempt at democracy (1999 to present) was almost marred by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's attempt to prolong his stay in office after two terms of four years, as stipulated in the nation's constitution. Obasanjo attempted in 2006 to have that part of the constitution changed by the nation's National Assembly in order to incorporate a third term in office for president. Prince Esan's action in *Mojagbe* can be interpreted as a throwback to April 22, 1990, when Major Gideon Orkar succeeded in entering the Dodan Barrack Palace of the Nigerian military dictator Gen. Ibrahim Babangida. Though he captured the Head of State, the coup failed, and Orkar and others involved were executed.

Prior to the Orkar led coup d'état, Babangida's bosom friend, General Mamman Vatsa (1940-1986), was executed in 1986 alongside many senior military officers for an attempted coup on his government. This information is well intended by Yerima to draw the attention of Nigerians to their historical past. Gideon Orkar and Mamman Vatsa were from the Northern part of Nigeria, the same region as Gen. Babangida who ordered them to be executed for their attempt to forcefully remove him from power. There is an echo of both the Vatsa and the Orkar coup and the eventual killing of the masterminds in

⁵⁴⁶ The election of June 12, 1993 supposedly won by late Nigerian businessman MKO Abiola was cancelled by the Head of State without providing a cogent reason. As the time of writing this paper, Ibrahim Babangida is preparing to contest the Nigerian Presidential election in 2011.

⁵⁴⁷ In Ahmed Yerima *Kaffir's Last Game* published in 1998, it was one of the thrusts of the play as Mbulelo asks Professor to make a categorical statement to the position of the Nigerian Head of State on what they in South Africa presume to be a rumour.

The Sisters. Yerima's intent is to present a slice of Nigeria's history in both plays. Mojagbe's position as a war general before assuming the position of king is intended to reinforce the message of the play. *Kaffir's Last Game* and *The Lottery Ticket* put a searchlight on the people's reliance on supernatural intervention on both economic and other daily needs, even the government's declaration of prayer days for the public. The ironic aspect of the nation and its people is that, despite its religious nature, corruption is rife even among the religious leaders who also throng the corridor of power seeking to gain financially from the prayers offered to God for the protection of the politicians' lives. In *Kaffir's Last Game*, the Nigerian transition process of 1996 is revisited and clearly dissected for its merit. Mbulelo, the South African character in the play, eager to know Professor's view on the transition, asks:

Mbulelo: ...How is the transition to civil rule going in your country?

Professor: On course. 1998 is our year, and there is so much activities already.

Mbulelo: Yes, we hear that the activities are people criss-crossing. They are all in a game of trying to guess which party your head of state will join. It is less than a year to go and there is still no one with clear presidential aspiration. This is very strange, don't you think so, Professor?⁵⁴⁸

Professor who is fully aware of the political situation in his home country, tries to deflect the questions by attempting to change the direction of the discussion which he does not seem comfortable with. Mbulelo, who is not ready to end the discussion, poses a direct question to Professor Omobusola concerning his opinion on the sincerity of the transition programme being embarked upon by the Nigerian Head of State:

Mbulelo: Professor, you are just coming from Nigeria, do you think that your Head of State will hand over to elected civilian President come October, 1998?⁵⁴⁹

Professor becomes religious in his response and would rather allow God to intervene. Professor, though, would have chosen not to respond to Mbulelo's question but for his insistence.

⁵⁴⁸ Yerima, *Kaffir's Last Game*, 18

⁵⁴⁹ Yerima, *Kaffir's Last Game*, 19

Professor: I will like to reassure the people of Africa and indeed the world, that I have no doubt that by the grace of God, the military will handover to a democratically elected civilian government by October.

Mbulelo: What about your Head of State?

Professor: General Sani Abacha? What about him? There is no big deal about a military officer becoming an elected president. Look at Lt. Rawling in Ghana, people voted for him. If the people vote for him, please let him rule.

Mbulelo: ...We in South Africa need to know. The whole world needs to know. You Nigerians need to know that gone are the days when you could live in isolation.⁵⁵⁰

At that time, Nigerians and the rest of the world shared Professor's sentiment for the on-going democratic process being orchestrated by Gen. Sani Abacha. Insincerity in the democratic process is also a major subject in *The Sisters* where the late president continually had himself re-elected into office on four occasions and was still planning to succeed himself before his untimely death. Of course, in reality it was not the first time in the history of Nigeria that the process of transition from military to civilian government would be set up. And on all occasions, apart from 1979 when Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo handed over power to Alhaji Shehu Shagari and 1999 when Gen. Abdusalam Abubakar handed over the power to Olusegun Obasanjo, were efforts in futility. During the eight-year rule of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993), there were more than two failed attempts of transitional process. *Kaffir's Last Game* positions Yerima as a social commentator: a socio-political critic.

As a social commentator, Yerima entrenches the socio-political realist issue of religions in his drama, especially the perennial contradictions of Christianity and African indigenous belief which I have talked about in chapter three. It is a perennial contradiction because, in the same breath, many of Yerima's main characters invoke the services of the Christian God and the indigenous gods simultaneously to resolve a knotty crisis:

Memekize: ...I prayed to Jesus through his mother the Virgin Mary for you, and he heard me. He always listens to me. They all do. And when

⁵⁵⁰ Yerima, *Kaffir's Last Game*, 19-20

I wanted to wash you, I called on Benikurukuru to heal, and she too did.⁵⁵¹

The opposing religious factors that I mentioned earlier re-vibrate in Memekize's prayer to both the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ of the Christian faith and Benikurukuru, the indigenous goddess of the Niger Delta creek for healing power. As mentioned in my Chapter three, the Christian religion restrains its adherents from believing or worshipping any other god, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me"⁵⁵² apart from Jehovah who can only be reached through Jesus Christ.

In most of the plays investigated in this thesis, Yerima employs a socio-political realist approach to criticize the cultural and political reality of Nigeria. When one considers the events that caused the militant insurgencies in the Nigerian Niger Delta which Yerima presented in *Little Drops*, one would be apt to agree with Chinua Achebe that "The old white master was still in power. He had got himself a bunch of black stooges to do his dirty work for a commission."⁵⁵³ Environmental degradation and neglect of corporate duties and social responsibilities of the foreign multinational oil companies like Shell, Chevron, and Mobil, in collusion with the Nigerian federal government, are major pointers to Achebe's statement. Whatever leads to the actions of the Niger Delta militants is planted by both the foreign oil companies and the Nigerian government. Osaghae, Ikelegbe, Olarinmoye, and Okhonmina statement captures it thus:

To all intents and purposes, it was the nature of state and corporate responses, treatment and governance that made violence the only option. They pushed the region into violence, insurrection and insurgency.⁵⁵⁴

Rather than accede or dialogue with the aggrieved youths and elders of the Niger Delta, the government and oil companies resort to force, suppression and

⁵⁵¹ Yerima, *Little Drops*, 15

⁵⁵² See Exodus 20:3 in *King James Version of The Holy Bible*

⁵⁵³ Ezenwa-Ohaeto, *Chinua Achebe: A Biography* (Bloomington/Oxford: Indiana University Press/James Currey, 1997), 137

⁵⁵⁴ Osaghae, E.E., et al., *Youth Militia, Self Determination and Resource Control Struggles in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria* (Lagos: CDP Nigeria, 2007), 78

repression. As Osaghae notes, “The youths chose to chest out and challenge the state with counter violence.”⁵⁵⁵ According to Joab-Peterside:

In some of these conflicts, the state security forces watch while violence raged especially in cases where intelligence reports indicate that the State’s business interests are not threatened. The reluctance of the State to provide security in perceived non-oil conflict situations created civilian insecurity that in turn stimulated rapid privatization of security [...] often times counterproductive as small arms provided for collective security resurfaced in intra community disagreements ultimately exacerbating violence.⁵⁵⁶

The international communities were only drawn into the Niger Delta crisis when the actions of the creek boys caused an increase in the prices of crude oil in the international market because of shortfall in production from the region. Efforts by humanitarian agencies were noticed when women and children became victims of the government’s counter attack in the region. How will one explain this statement by Memekize: “I hear the government people have sworn to wipe us all out tonight.”⁵⁵⁷ This question-like statement is made out of fear, against the backdrop of what the federal government is known to have done in pasttimes.

In November, 1999, the Nigerian federal government, under former President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007), gave orders for the massacre of the Ijaws of Odi, a town in the Niger Delta, and this action was promptly executed by the country’s army. Prior to the massacre, it was reported that twelve members of the Nigerian police were killed by armed militants from the town. The onslaught of the government saw the death of many civilians. The figure which Nnimmi Bassey, Executive Director of Environment Right Action, put at nearly 2500. The three buildings that were left standing in Odi town were the Anglican Church, the health centre and a bank. In fact, Odi was wiped out. Like in *Kaffir’s Last Game* and in *Little Drops*, Yerima uses realistic “language, images, characters and conflicts as vessels”⁵⁵⁸ to draw his Nigerian reader-

⁵⁵⁵ Osaghae, E. E., et al., *Youth Militia, Self Determination and Resource Control Struggles in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria* (Lagos: CDP Nigeria, 2007), 78

⁵⁵⁶ Joab-Peterside, Sofiri, “On the Militarization of Nigeria’s Niger Delta: The Genesis of Ethnic Militia in River State, Nigeria” in *Niger Delta Economies Violence* 21 (2007), 2

⁵⁵⁷ Yerima, *Little Drops*, 21

⁵⁵⁸ Yerima, *Theatre, Culture and Politics: Essays in Dramatic and Cultural Theory* (Lagos: Concept Publications, 2007), 234

audience to the reality around them. He uses vivid imagery in statements such as:

Memekize: A straight small bullet like a pistol straight into his small back not breaking a bone ...lodged in his stomach. It is swelling. The stench you smelt, woman, is from his breath. His small stomach is beginning to rot. That was why he did not ask for food. His stomach is full of the lead of death....Little drops of blood....His life continues to sip (sic) away with every little drop of blood.”⁵⁵⁹

The expressions are used to draw out the empathic feeling of the reader-audience towards the plight of the innocent victims. The ire of the reader-audience will be drawn towards the actions of both the Militants and JTF against innocent children as they are killed without restraint. They are both guilty of the heinous crimes against humanity. As I have said in my introduction on the work of Ahmed Yerima, he represents society in many of his plays without taking a particular position either for or against the government. In one of my interviews with him, he states that it is the duty of the playwright to tell the people how things are without thinking of playing God by providing a solution. Although it is possible to come across some forms of contradiction when analyzing his plays as I have done. This is because, in many of his plays, he pitches his tent with the people instead of the government which he worked for until January 2010.

Yerima writes that one of the inspirations for the play *Mojagbe* “is the type of leaders we have. How we forget to learn from history and how man confronts himself searching for an inner peace which he himself often destroys in the first place.... And because power itself is excitedly sweet, man will never learn.”⁵⁶⁰ This inspiration from failed leadership and the self-destructive stance of African governments is poignant in plays like *Kaffir's Last Game*, and *The Sisters*.

The play *Mojagbe* reveals the tyrannical life of the main character, King Mojagbe, who, before the opening of the play, committed inconceivable atrocities, including human sacrifices and matricide. Mojagbe's matricide is intentional and purposeless. The king also involves the town and its citizens into an unnecessary war with a more powerful state. Whereas the meaning of sacrifice among the Yorubas' is for cleansing the land/community, oneself or

⁵⁵⁹ Yerima, *Little Drops*, 30

⁵⁶⁰ Yerima, *Mojagbe*, (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2008), 6

home of any perceived evils and to deflect impending doom, Mojaḡbe's case has the opposite meaning. The purpose of King Mojaḡbe's sacrifices is for the sole aim of achieving illusionary immortality (longevity in office). Through the ill advice of his personal priest Isepe, whom he later killed, King Mojaḡbe commits matricide and also murders his first wife as requirements for the needed sacrifice for longevity. He also refuses to perform the yearly kingly ritual at the Ogun festival; an act the people believed caused the sudden death of Ogundele, the young priest of Ogun. The yearly kingly ritual at the Ogun festival is supposed to cleanse the land of evil of the year before and usher it into a peaceful and prosperous new year.

After the death of Ogundele, Mojaḡbe marries his widow. This act within the Yoruba socio-cultural belief is sacrilegious and a taboo because the young woman is in mourning, and needs to refrain from a relationship with the opposite sex for a certain period of time. According to Oyeniyi and Ige, "The mourning period among the Yorubas may last for forty days or four months (120 days) and the widow is expected to wear a pensive look and be clad in black attire to all public places."⁵⁶¹ The marrying of Ogundele's widow while in mourning is, in the words of Balogun, a "forbidden act even for a king."⁵⁶²

As a tyrant, King Mojaḡbe shares characteristics with some of Nigerian's military governments like General Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993) and General Sanni Abacha (1993-1998). King Mojaḡbe represses freedom of speech and disperses revolt or protest by employing all of his military might; a situation similar to what happened in Nigeria during the government of Babangida and Abacha when protesters against their regimes were ruthlessly gunned down. In April, 1986, under General Ibrahim Babangida, many who protested against the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) orchestrated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were gunned down in various cities of Nigeria. General Sanni Abacha's government was noted for shooting at protesters, especially following protests against the annulment of June 12 presidential elections in 1993 by Gen. Babangida which saw Abacha seizing power from the interim government of Chief Ernest Sonekan.

As death becomes inevitable for King Mojaḡbe, he is remorseful and regrets his atrocious acts of killing his own mother and his wife. He begs God to forgive him his many sinful acts: "My wife and my mother ...all wasted souls

⁵⁶¹ See Oyeniyi, A.J., Ige, A., "Widowhood Practices Among the Yorubas of South West Nigeria: are there Differences in what Women Experiences Due to their Status?" in *Gender and Behaviour*, 8/2 2010

<http://www.faqs.org/periodicals/201012/2187713301.html#ixzz1EnsxKQyN>

⁵⁶² Yerima, *Mojaḡbe*, 17

then? May Eledumare forgive me.”⁵⁶³ One can also liken the late president in *The Sisters* to King Mojagbe as they both share many similarities. Yerima’s intention is to use both King Mojagbe and the late president to teach modern African leaders the end result of misrule and tyranny. Before the sudden death of the president, he had ruled for four terms of five years each and was preparing for a re-election under the grand illusion that he was liked by the people. Taiwo informs Funmi (the widow) that her late husband was a tyrant who was never liked by the citizens of the nation he presided over:

Taiwo:The man had ruled this country for twenty years. Four terms, four rotten terms, and he was still looking ahead to the future? What future? Whose future? The people were praying for you to leave, and you had the grand illusion that we loved you and wanted you to stay for another term? Did you have no eyes? Were you so much in love with power that you became blind?⁵⁶⁴

Taiwo statement recaptures the mood of Nigerians when Gen. Sani Abacha died suddenly on June 8, 1998. At the announcement of Abacha’s death the street of Lagos and other major cities in Nigeria was full of jubilant people who celebrated his demise.

In the world of Funmi, after the president’s death, the people celebrated with a poem composed to belittle his government: “It revealed to me how so intently, the people my husband had laboured for and served all his life, hated him. The whole nation celebrated the words of the poem. Children I heard learnt by heart...”⁵⁶⁵ This sit-tight syndrome is common with most African leaders who are under the grand illusion that without them in power, the nations they preside over cannot move forward. Cases in point are Egypt under almost thirty years of Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011) and Libya under Col. Muammar Gadhafi (1942-2011). Gadhafi ruled for forty-two years and would not leave power even after six months of violent protest, until he was captured and killed by those rebellious to his government. It took violent protest and civil war for changes to occur in these two countries in 2011.

The two major problems of African leaders are greed and fear. They are so comfortable being in possession of the nation’s commonwealth which they can spend alone with their families, and so afraid of becoming ordinary

⁵⁶³ Yerima, *Mojagbe*, 44

⁵⁶⁴ Yerima, *The Sisters*, 19

⁵⁶⁵ Yerima, *The Sisters*, 12

citizens, they refrain from making any post-presidency plans. This fear of being ousted out of the privilege position of “Your Excellency” to become a member of the masses is what Funmi grudgingly voices in *The Sisters* as Taiwo asked her what she is going to do after leaving the comfort of the presidential palace:

Taiwo: How will you cope Funmi?

Funmi: I don’t know. I am so scared. I have not given a thought to life outside here.⁵⁶⁶

Most African leaders and those around them are afraid of life outside the confines of presidency; frightened of the reactions of the masses to many of the atrocities they (leaders) committed while in office, so they refuse to give a thought to living as ordinary members of society without the accustomed retinues. These are some of the reasons why the majority of leaders will want to live and die as the head of state of their various nations.

The Lottery Ticket depicts the contemporary social reality of the Nigerian lower class. At the lowest step of the Nigerian economic ladder are those ordinary people who toil daily to provide a manageable sustenance for themselves and their family. This step is populated with the small quantity food vendor like Mama Lizi, the road-side tailor, the motor-park tout, the beggar, the junior police and traffic control personnel; in some instances the landlord in a squalid or shanty community can belong to the group. In fact this is where you find the lowest class of the society. The play gives a naturalistic portrayal of this people as they are found in this society. “Buka”⁵⁶⁷, a squalid restaurant is where people of this class of society frequently congregate. Visible in all the plays discussed are bad leadership, selfishness, the desire to accumulate sinful wealth, corruption, illiteracy, hunger and superstitions by the deployment of cynicism.

Yerima revealed to the world the evils committed under the military regime of Gen. Sani Abacha in *Kaffir’s Last Game*. The issues of the cancellation of the June 12 election, the murder of Alhaja Kudirat Abiola, the perceived “troublesome-wife” of the acclaimed winner of the 1993 election, Chief MKO Abiola, features prominently in the play. Yerima went ahead to

⁵⁶⁶ Yerima, *The Sisters*, 35

⁵⁶⁷ The word Buka is a short form of Bukatariat. The word derived from the combination of Buka and cafeteria refers to a small canteen or space for selling already prepared meals for diners to either eat right there or take it away. It is different from a restaurant because of the dirty state, it sells only food popular with the indigenous people and mostly manned by poor and illiterate people. The word and its application are initially popular among the Yoruba language speakers until lately when it entered into Nigerian lexicon.

call the Head of State names like, “Populist Dictator! Embezzler! President and Liar for life.”⁵⁶⁸

The situation that necessitates brain drain in the Nigerian educational sector up to the end of the twentieth century is treated in the play and captured by Reuben Embu as he writes:

Generally education has not been accorded the necessary attention in Nigeria. Governments at all levels have been paying lip service to the educational sector. This is reflected in the primary, secondary and higher institutions including the universities that are considered the highest citadel of learning. The story is usually the same from the elected civilian government to dictatorial military regimes over the years.⁵⁶⁹

Apart from the political situation in Nigeria, there are other factors like the inadequate salary paid to academics, incessant closure of the universities and infrastructural decay in the various institutions of higher learning. A strangulating experience for academics, Professor tries to explain to Mbulelo why he must take up an appointment at the University of Cape Town:

Professor: ...Do you know that right now, I am richer than two Universities’ vote put together? Do you know that for the past two years after the so called review of University teaching staff salaries, I have been earning ten thousand naira a month. One hundred and sixteen miserable dollars for a Professor of twenty-five years and still counting? Do you know that as a Dean, all I was given was ten thousand naira to run the faculty, with researches, conferences and all?⁵⁷⁰

Though Mbulelo puts it succinctly that, despite the efforts of the South African government the youths are not positioning themselves for the many opportunities available to them. Whether the South African government is

⁵⁶⁸ Yerima, *Kaffir’s Last Game*, 34

⁵⁶⁹ Embu, Rueben, “Brain Drain and the University in Contemporary Nigerian: Lessons from Kaffir’s Last Game” in Gbemisola Adeoti, ed. *Muse and Mimesis: Critical Perspectives on Ahmed Yerima’s Drama* (Ibadan: Spectrum, 2007), 74

⁵⁷⁰ Yerima, *Kaffir’s Last Game*, 14

planning for its population⁵⁷¹ is not visible as evidence suggests otherwise. The constant labour unrest and the xenophobic attacks that occurred in the country since 2004 sheds light on the fact that the majority of black South Africans do not have jobs.

As indicated in the previous section, the violence among the black youth in South Africa that *Kaffir's Last Game* refers to as “sitting on a keg of gun powder.” finally escalated with the killing of foreign (African) nationals staying in the country. The violence against foreigners is a way of telling the world that all is not well. The play explores to a greater extent, the historical and political linkage that existed between the two countries (Nigeria and South Africa) during the period of apartheid in South Africa to the collapse of the white minority rule. The political relationship between the two countries is such that it cannot be termed congenial on all sides; it is neither cold nor hot. The two nations (Nigeria and South Africa) are playing a cat and mouse game interchangeably, rivalling one another in who is the ‘giant’ of Africa. There is no bilateral agreement between the two countries for free movement of their citizens without recourse to visas. Meanwhile citizens of US, UK, and other European countries can move in and out of South Africa without visa restrictions.

Though the issue of brain drain seems to be the main thematic preoccupation of *Kaffir's Last Game*, one should nevertheless not lose sight of the delicate relationship between the two countries in the play. A situation that necessitates the movement of a nation's skilled labour from their own country to another deserves to be addressed. In order to address the issue of loyalty to one's nation, Professor is left in a state of confusion at the end of the play. He has to resolve a raging inner conflict by making a decision of whether to go ahead to take up the position at the University of Cape Town or return to his home country. This juncture, if Professor wants to go back to Nigeria or proceed on his journey to Cape Town, is left to his decision. The exposition of man's inner conflicts is a constant technique in Yerima's narrative style as it is present in virtually all of his plays.

With *Little Drops*, *Mojagbe* and *Kaffir's Last Game*, Yerima clearly positions himself as a dramatist with concerns for the masses. Unlike the allegorical plays of Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan, Yerima refrains from couching the world of his plays in phantasmagorias by presenting them as they are with visible references. At the time of writing this work, apart from Bunmi

⁵⁷¹ By the population here I am referring to the indigenous African community and not to the European-African community.

Julius-Adeoye's *War at Peace* and Ahmed Yerima's *Little Drops* there seems to be little or no other play from Nigeria's literary landscape which takes a realist approach to the dramatic construction of the Niger Delta crisis.

Conclusion

These works present Yerima as a fearless, twenty-first century socio-political realist dramatist who is not afraid of whose horse is gored. Just as he did with his other plays, he risked his position⁵⁷² as the Artistic Director of a government owned institution by continuously pitching his tent with the masses and allowing his art to reflect Nigeria's society. In most of the works, especially *Kaffir's Last Game*, *The Lottery Ticket* and *Little Drops*, Nigeria's festering political system and social institutions are x-rayed in order for the generality of the reader-audience to proffer a suitable solution. I have also highlighted the fact that the issue of religious realism, which I discussed in chapter three, has a place in *Little Drops* and *Mojagbe*. All the plays reflect Nigeria's socio-political reality. I have linked the analyzed plays to some visible historical past within the post-independent Nigerian and indeed African society, drawing on visible names and political figures within the country and the whole of the African continent. Socio-political realism in drama is not necessarily a new form of realism; I believe what makes it different is that it uses popular indices like names, professions, institutions, events, etc., within the society to interrogate dramatic discourse. Socio-political realist plays give representations of everyday concern and the politics of the society by arguing the point of the disenfranchised members of the community. A definition of socio-political realism that best captures my argument is the one which states that it "is a term used to describe visual and other realistic art works which chronicled the everyday conditions of the working classes and the poor and are critical of the social environment that causes these conditions."⁵⁷³

Socio-political realism is faced with the same problems that its hydra-headed root (realism) has. I believe that socio-political realism, as one of the

⁵⁷² Shortly after staging *Little Drops* in 2009, Yerima's position as the Director-General of the National Theatre, National Troupe and Abuja Carnival was taken away from him by the government. To force him out of the position, he was returned to his formal position as Artistic Director of Nigerian National Troupe while other people took over the headship of National Theatre of Nigeria and Abuja Carnival. This decision may have contributed to his decision to resign the government appointment and return back to the university system as a professor. At the moment, he is a Professor of Theatre and Cultural Studies at Redeemer's University (RUN), Nigeria.

⁵⁷³ See "Social Realism Vs. Socialist Realism" at

<http://www.huntfor.com/arthistory/C20th/socrealism.htm>. Accessed on 15 dec. 2010.

many sprouting heads of realism, aims at an intimate as well as critical relationship between art and the society it claims to be representing. Yerima's socio-political realist plays give details of everyday life (names of persons, of places, of events, of institutions, languages etc), creation of social types characteristic behaviour, etc. For example, *Kaffir's Last Game* and *Little Drops* have narratives that deal with the social and political system in Nigeria and how they affect the ordinary man in the community with visible references.

Dramas of socio-political realism that criticize anti-masses policies of governments or harmful socio-cultural practices may have immense impact on cultural and political debates as well as among intellectuals. But to what extent is the power of socio-political realist drama able to effect change in society? Many theatre critics of African descent have argued that theatre has a dual functionality. That is, theatre is both entertaining and didactic. According to Femi Osofisan:

...all our artists—from the ancient oral performers to their modern scribal heirs; from Negritude's Leopold Senghor to TigrITUDE's Wole Soyinka—have accepted and reveled in their identity as communal spokespersons and as the conscience of their societies. The art of narration in our communities has always served didactic as well as pleasurable ends. The injunction to 'teach by entertaining', that dictum so basic to Aristophanes, to Racine, and to Synge, underlies the raconteur's praxis in black Africa. The folk tales entertain with their wit and song, but they also teach and inculcate the community's acceptable ethics, they enlighten the young about the nature of human society and the environment, about the teeming life of the forests and rivers, and the appropriate canons of social interaction and penal redress. From them we extract the valuable lesson that stories are never ideologically innocent.⁵⁷⁴

The question that arises from the foregoing is what is socio-political realist drama? In this context I refer to socio-political realist dramas as those plays that are constructed with the intent of aiming to reveal some social and political malaise besetting society.

German playwright Bertolt Brecht employed the theatre as a platform for political ideas and for the creation of a critical aesthetics. He refined epic

⁵⁷⁴ Osofisan, Femi, "Reflections on Theatre Practice in Contemporary Nigeria" in *African Affairs*, 97 (London: Oxford university Press, 1998), 83

theatre to further project his political ideas. Brecht's works are not only popular in Europe and United States of America; they are also an inspiration for Nigerian dramatists like Femi Osofisan. To Africans, his alienation technique is not what is of paramount significance, as such, but the didactic nature of this technique. The didactic nature of his theatre helped dramatists like Femi Osofisan to shroud his revolutionary dramatic content in metaphor in order to avoid censorship.

Socio-political realist plays by Nigerian playwrights discuss the malaise in Nigerian society. They reveal the fraud and corruption endemic in the Nigerian polity. Fraud and corruption are negative Siamese-twins that are present among the different strata of the Nigerian government. More than half (approximately 29 years) of the fifty years of the nation's self-rule were spent under military dictatorship,⁵⁷⁵ who were more corrupt than the civilians they sacked on allegation of corruption. The years under democratic government were not spared of leaders who also used their power and influence primarily in the pursuit of private goals. Infact, the military's excuses for coming into government in Nigeria is always premised on the corruption of civilian leaders and their employment of power and influences primarily for their own gains. These leaders (civilian and military) subject the society to decay and poverty. Dilapidated structures, international debt, incessant strikes, failed social systems, corruption, civil unrest, extra judicial killings etc., are the results left behind by successive governments in Nigeria.

⁵⁷⁵ These leaders are military Generals, starting with Aguiyi Ironsi (1966-1966), General Yakubu Gowon, (1966-1975), Generals Muritala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo (1975-1979), Gen. Mohammadu Buhari (1984-1985), Gen. Ibrahim B. Babangida (1985-1993), Gen. Sanni Abacha (1993-1997), Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar (1998-1999). See Nigeria: Chronology of main political events since independence, IRIN, 2003.
<http://www.irinnews.org/InDepthMain.aspx?InDepthId=30&ReportId=70462>. Accessed Thursday 26/08/2010. 06:55